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No. 155.

MARGARET'S PROMISE.

BY EREN Z. KEXFORD.

"What shall I bring you, Margaret?
A bunch of roses red,
Or lilies for your snowy breast,
Or violets instead?"
"Oh, bring me what you like," she said,
"And I will be content."
I saw her rosy cheeks grow red,
Although her head was bent.
"Well, I have brought it, Margaret,"
I whispered tenderly.
"You promised you would be content,
And left the choice to me."
"I will not break my word," she said;
"What is it you have brought?"
"A heart that loves you, Margaret,
And many a tender thought."
"And you must take it, Margaret;
And make your promise good;
Say, will you, dear, or will you not?
You know you said you would."
"Well, if I must, I must!" she sung,
As gayly as a bird;
"Not, sir, because I want your heart,
But just to keep my word!"

The Beautiful Forger:

OR,
THE ADVENTURES OF A YOUNG GIRL.

BY MRS. E. F. ELLETT.

AUTHOR OF "MADEIRA'S MARRIAGE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A DISCOVERY.

AFTER the American conquest of California, some of the descendants of the Spanish Californians still held large landed estates. The social condition of the country was utterly unsettled about 1848, and Mexican and savage outlaws worked their will among the more civilized settlers, almost without fear of law. There was a small settlement, or *rancheria*, at this early period, on King's river, near the point where its seven or eight channels unite again in a calm, broad stream—not far from what is now a port of entry and naval station, at the confluence of the San Joaquin and Sacramento rivers, some fifty miles above San Francisco. Two or three miles from this hamlet, a rudely constructed but commodious house stood on ground overlooking a plain covered with water during part of the year. This house was noted as the residence of an eccentric though benevolent man, who had lived there but a short time. Dr. Merle had the fame of a skillful physician, and of something more. The ignorant common people who often profited by his medical advice, although bestowed gratuitously, believed that his chemical experiments aimed at wonderful discoveries in occult science. It was rumored that he possessed secrets of nature unknown to mankind in general; and his strictly-scientific habits, his love of study, and devotion to scientific research, had fostered this popular belief. Thus his humble home, shared only by his young daughter and an elderly housekeeper, with a surgical student who performed the duties of an assistant, became a spot marked by superstition among the farmers and herdsmen for miles around.

The red and gold of sunset had long since faded from the snowy peaks of the Sierra Nevada, and the dark distant masses were indistinguishable from the heavy gray clouds. Within the house was light enough to show a square room lined by shelves full of books and various utensils used in chemical experiments. A round oaken table in the center, on which stood the lamp, was littered with crucibles, small flasks, a pair of scales, and other paraphernalia of a lover of natural philosophy, who found his favorite occupation in making analyses, and concocting various useful compounds.

Dr. Merle was a man considerably past middle age, with a thick, grizzled beard and masses of gray hair, dark complexion, and deep-set gray eyes. He wore an under-shirt with a blue flannel shirt outside, a neck-tie, loose trousers, and long boots. His outer shirt was fastened with a blue sash over a belt in which a sheathed knife was secured. His form was tall and majestic, though not robust; his countenance frank and expressive; his whole appearance both dignified and prepossessing.

He was reading and noting passages from a volume on the table. Suddenly he looked up, listening; then rose and walked to the window. The October wind blew fiercely, bowing the heads of the trees in front of the gate. Through the still air he could distinctly hear another sound: that of a horse's hoofs, approaching nearer and nearer.

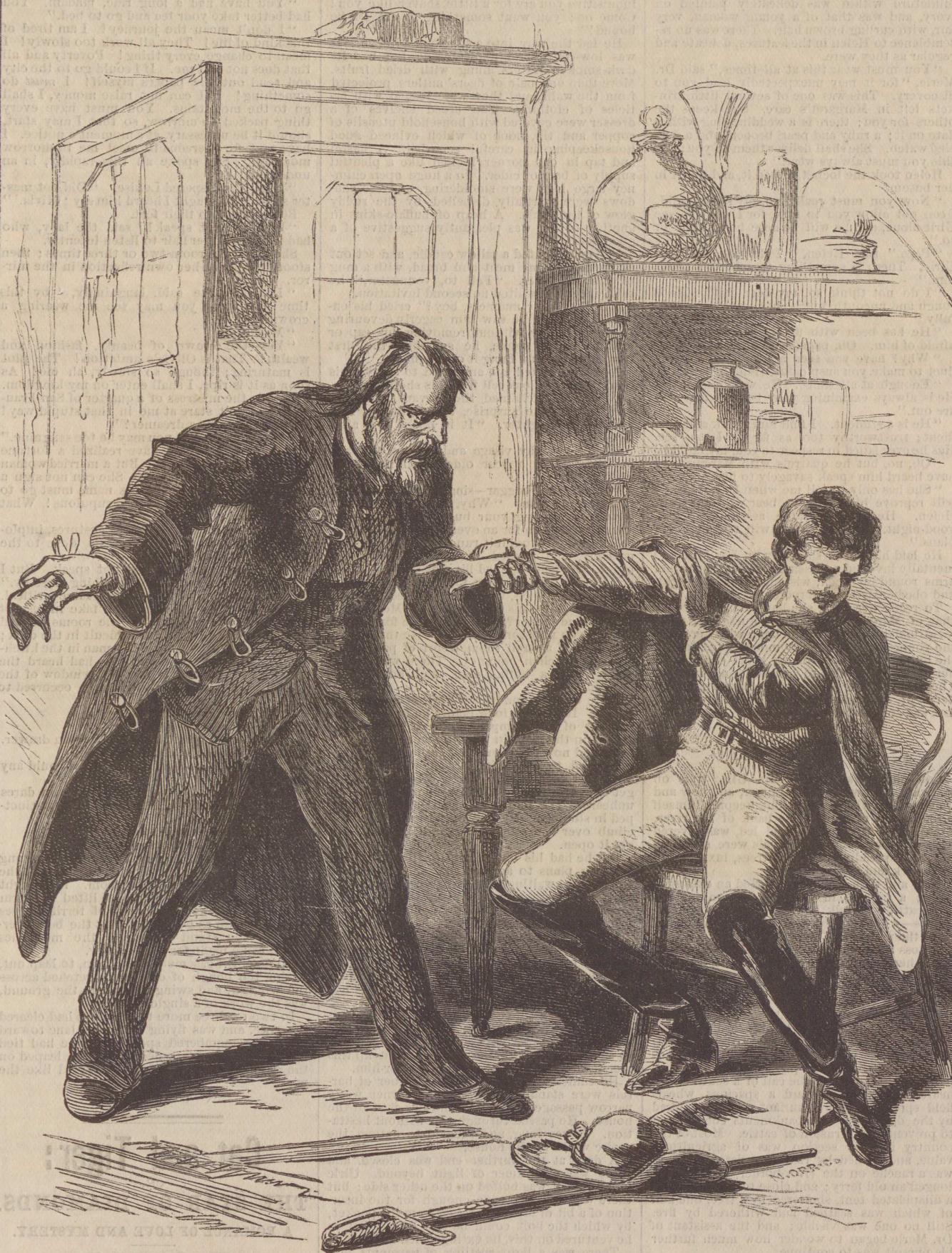
Dr. Merle opened the room door, stepped out into the passage, and then opened the front door, which was fastened by a bolt. A gust of wind blew back the hair from his forehead, as, peering out, he saw a horseman stop and dismount at his gate.

A visitor so late was strange in his dwelling; for though the humble settlers had often availed themselves of his medical skill, he had rarely been called forth to visit them except during the day. They realized that Dr. Merle was no ordinary practitioner; but one who craved solitude and leisure. An alchemist, intent on discovering powerful elixirs, or the transmuting metal whose touch could

"Make the black iron start forth brilliant gold," could not be mindful of the convenience or the small wants of simple rustics, when their importunity might interfere with the success of his pursuits.

The traveler fastened his horse carelessly at the gate, and entered the inclosure with a light and buoyant step. Even before the doctor could see his face, he was aware that it was a young man. Stepping back, he threw the door wide open, and invited his visitor into the study.

The stranger followed, as bidden, and took the seat offered, removing his cap as he did so. He pushed the chair back from the lamp, but there was light enough to see that his features were delicate and his complexion smooth; the fairer from the contrast of a thin, black, silky mustache. His cloak, which he retained, was of dark serge bordered with black fur; a black silk scarf was tied around his neck, and he wore thick leather gloves. He looked around the room furtively, as if uneasy; yet his manner had a rather unusual swag; it was as if he was striving to conceal apprehension by an affectation of boldness.



"Aha, Madame!" he exclaimed. "It is as I half suspected. You are masquerading in disguise!"

Dr. Merle took from a shelf a black bottle containing wine, poured some into a battered silver cup, and offered it to his visitor.

"You have ridden far," he said, "and ought to take some refreshment."
The stranger started, but declined the wine.

"How do you know I have ridden far?" he asked, after a moment's hesitation.

"Your horse bears the marks of long and rapid riding," returned the doctor, "and you are heated with the exercise. You had better take something."

Again the hospitality was declined, with thanks.

"You have not been very long in this place?" at length the young man asked.

"A little more than a year. I came up from the South. But you probably know all about me."

"I have heard that you lived for years in Mexico, and that you are noted for your skill in medical science."

"I do not know about that. I left Mexico years ago." He paused, aware that the young stranger was intently studying his face. Then he returned the gaze; for his curiosity was piqued by the voice and manner of the youth, so much superior to those he was in the habit of seeing.

The stranger evidently shrank from particular observation. "You may think it strange," he said, "not without embarrassment, that I should come to you, at such an hour of the evening, unprovided with an introduction. But I wish to consult you confidentially."

"Or rather, to ask your aid in the strictest confidence. I am convinced of your skill. May I speak to you, assured that your secrecy may be equally relied upon?"

"It is a part of my profession to be discreet, as well as skillful," replied the doctor.

"But yours is not—I mean you are not an ordinary physician?"

"I do not practice in general. But if I can be of service in any case of emergency, you may command me."

"Thanks. I will trust you in every thing. My father has an aged servant who has for years suffered with an intensely painful disease which is entirely incurable. So terrible are its ravages upon his system that only the more violent drugs have the least effect; and those are soon rendered powerless; so that he has no relief. I am sent for a medicine more potent than any he

has yet taken. It is composed of two or three ingredients; they are written here, with the proportions."

He took from his vest-pocket a folded paper, and handed it to Dr. Merle, who opened it and read what was written. He started as he did so in evident surprise; then folded up the paper, and laid it on the table.

"Are you aware, young man," he said, "that the ingredients composing the medicine you wish to procure make it one of the most active poisons known?" he asked, fixing his eyes on the stranger's face.

"I was not—that is—I knew it must be something powerful; for nothing else does any good," the youth answered, without changing countenance.

"A poison—and one perfectly untraceable," the doctor thought he noticed a sinister gleam in his visitor's eyes as he said this. He continued:

"It is strange your father should have sent you on such an errand."

"He had no one else on whom he could depend."

"True; it must have been so. It would not do to trust such a medicine in the hands of ignorant persons."

The doctor rose, walked to a cabinet in the corner of the study, unlocked it and took out two or three small crystal flasks. Out of each of these he poured successively a little into another, and from this filled with a pale violet-colored liquid a glass vial, which he corked tightly.

The stranger watched him eagerly. At the same time he drew from his breast-pocket a purse well filled with gold. As the doctor returned to his seat, he took out three coins, and held them out, as in exchange for the drug he expected to receive.

"Put back your money, sir," said the doctor, somewhat haughtily. "I do not take pay for medicines, till I know they work well."

"But this is sure to do so. Will you give it me?"

"Not till I receive a satisfactory declaration that it is to be administered for the saving of life and not for its destruction."

The young man bowed his head, but the doctor noticed that he grew very pale.

"You have not given me your father's name, and I have not asked it; for as you come from a distance, it is not likely I know him."

"Indeed you would not—"

"What security have I, then, that this liquid, which will cause death if not given with the utmost caution—death without a trace of its effect—is not designed to work evil? You can see by the directions pasted on the vial that thirty drops are sufficient to destroy life instantaneously. What pledge can you give me that it will be used for a good purpose?"

"I will pledge you my word."

"I want more than that. I require a solemn oath."

"An oath?"

"An oath on this book," and the doctor pushed aside some parchments on the table and brought out a pocket Bible, which he handed to the young man.

"I will take no oath," the visitor exclaimed.

"If I were a murderer in intent, of what use would an oath be?" He pushed back the volume.

"I require it, or you get no drug from me."

"You are unreasonable, Dr. Merle. I offer you liberal payment. In place of the oath, I will double the price, and give you my word besides."

"Nothing but the oath sworn on this book can satisfy me. Will you take it or not?"

"I will give you three—four times the price," said the stranger, earnestly, drawing back as if unwilling to touch the volume.

"I told you I wanted no money for my medicines. If I were unwilling to dispense with the oath a minute ago, I am more unwilling now. Your reluctance makes me believe you do not intend fair play."

The young man laughed as if in scorn at the suspicion. The doctor rose and went to the cabinet, as if to restore the vial to its place.

"Stay," exclaimed the visitor. "Since you are so terribly scrupulous, I give up. Have your own way, doctor."

"You will take the oath, then?"

Dr. Merle came again to the table.

"I will take it or any thing you like. I will repeat after you."

The doctor took up the book reverently. The youth extended his hand to receive for him the vial.

"Not in a leatheren glove!" cried Merle, drawing it back again. "Take off your glove, young sir. You should know better than to touch this book on such an occasion with covered hands."

The stranger uttered an exclamation of angry impatience, and made a movement as if turning away displeased.

"As you please," said Dr. Merle. "The oath must be administered properly, or not at all. I will have no irreverence. I begin to think you know nothing of the nature of a solemn test like that."

"Fool!" muttered the young man in his teeth.

"As you please again. It is nothing to me whether you take this or leave it."

With suppressed rage, the young man began unfastening the glove on his right hand, drawing it off with evident reluctance.

"Let me help you," said the doctor, taking in his firm grasp the slender wrist of his visitor; and with a sudden pull, he had the glove removed.

The hand was delicate, small, and white as milk; two of the slender fingers wore rings of great value. The owner of the hand struggled to release it, but it was held fast, while the doctor peered with his keen, flashing eyes into the flushed face averted from his gaze.

"Aha! Madame!" he exclaimed. "It is as I half suspected. You are masquerading in disguise!"

"Let me go, sir, this instant!"

"I must deal with you as the man you represent yourself. Let me relieve you of your cloak—so?"

In spite of the indignant struggles of his prisoner, Dr. Merle threw off the cloak, drew out the rapier, and quietly took off the false mustache. A velvet bodice, a short, tunic skirt, white silk hose and cavalier boots, formed the dress beneath the cloak; but the struggling had loosened fine plaits of black hair concealed under thick brown curls, and these fell over the slender, graceful neck, leaving no doubt of the sex of the visitor.

Her cheeks were crimson; her eyes blazed defiance and fury; she stamped her foot in a tempest of passion.

"You shall rue this violence, sir!" she exclaimed, endeavoring to repossess herself of her rapier.

"Softly, madame! all in good time! You shall be satisfied. I am so already."

"How dare you—"

"I was not afraid of you as a man; as a lady, I humbly crave your pardon," replied the doctor, bowing. "It would have been better to come to me in your own character, for then you would have been safe from harsh usage."

Muttering threats of vengeance, the discomfited stranger, having secured her cloak and weapon, moved toward the door.

"Stay, madame; will you not take what you came for?"

The disguised woman turned back. "Can I have it?" she asked.

"On the same condition; the oath I required."

She stepped up to the table and took the book in her ungloved hand. Dr. Merle repeated the terms of the oath, to which she carelessly assented, and at his bidding, lifted the volume to her lips. Then she offered it to him to take it from her, and held out her hand for the vial, which she received in silence.

"I suppose it would be useless to ask why you have come to me?" the doctor said, steadfastly regarding her.

"Quite useless, sir. Your curiosity would be baffled. Good-evening."

She flung on the cap and cloak, and strode from the room as she spoke.

Dr. Merle came after her with the light, but before he could say aught to detain her, she had sprung upon her horse, and vanished in the darkness.

CHAPTER II.

A REVELATION.

As he returned into his study, Dr. Merle touched a small bell on the table. It was promptly answered by a singular-looking being, the first sight of whom was startlingly repulsive, but more from the sinister expression of his face than any personal ugliness. He was apparently about twenty-eight years of age, uncommonly short of stature, but broad and robust. His full, compact, muscular frame gave promise of prodigious strength, and was not ungainly, notwithstanding his want of the usual height. His movements were quick and agile. His arms were sinewy, his hands large but well shaped; his complexion was dark and muddy; his lips were thick, sensual, and dark red; his eyebrows and beard were heavy; the hair, black, straight, and luxuriant, hung in a mass over his ears and his broad forehead, within two inches of a pair of black, deep-set, flashing eyes, that gleamed at times from beneath the bushy brows with a leer of cunning mingled with ferocity. The eyes, hair, and chin showed the blood of a half-breed. Ulric Boyce was, in fact, the son of an Indian woman of high rank in her tribe, by a French surgeon, who had visited her country with a troop of European soldiers. He had lived with his father from infancy, and had been well educated, according to what was thought learning in that day. After his father's death, he returned to his mother's people, but did not remain with them. He had fallen in with Dr. Merle, who was in need of an assistant, and found Ulric's active habits and willingness to learn of valuable use. In this wild region, associates and domestics had to be chosen for other qualities than those which form the ground of attachment in social life. Ulric was anxious to perfect his knowledge of the science that had caused the savages to reverence his father. Dr. Merle had been pleased with the sagacity, promptness, industry, and the keen apprehension of the young man, who was willing to serve him for a moderate compensation, and who appeared to desire knowledge for its own sake. So Ulric had become a member of Dr. Merle's family.

"Not in bed yet, Ulric?" said the doctor.

"Not yet, sir," returned the assistant.

"I have had a visitor—you saw him?"

"I saw a young gentleman ride away just now," answered Ulric.

"Throw a saddle on my fastest horse, and follow him, but not so closely as to be avoided," said Dr. Merle. "Don't give the alarm to any one; I can trust you. That young man was a woman in disguise."

Ulric made no reply, but a look of intelligence answered for him.

"She came on a strange errand; she wanted medicine—a poison. I could see that she meant mischief, so I gave her a drug that can do no harm! It is as innocent as pure water."

"Who is she?"

"That is what I want to know. Of course she would not give me her name, nor tell me where she lived. But you can easily find out. She will ride leisurely, for she has far to go. She went toward the east. Go, mount and follow her."

"Shall I give her any message?"

"By no means. I only want to know where she lives, and what is her real name. She spoke of her father; he must be a wealthy man. I am convinced she has some evil purpose to accomplish, which it is the duty of a good citizen to frustrate. But I will not detain you. As soon as you have discovered her house or name, you can return to me."

The man bowed low, with a promise of strict obedience, and went out. In a few moments he was heard riding rapidly from the gate. He took the direction indicated, following the road, and the moon just then appeared above the horizon of the east.

Dr. Merle seated himself again at the table, and drew a folio volume toward him; but he could not fix his attention on its contents. At last he pushed the book aside, and threw himself back in his chair, absorbed in deep thought.

A door at another end of the apartment from that opening on the passage was softly unclosed. A light form glided in, and came noiselessly to the chair where the physician sat. He half started up in surprise at seeing his new visitor.

"Helen!" he exclaimed, in a tone that almost savored of reproach.

"Dear father, don't be vexed with me for this intrusion! But I was so anxious about you."

"Anxious!" he repeated.

"You always go to your room early, very soon after I do, and I waited to hear your steps on the stairs. I could not imagine what kept you up beyond the time. You are not angry with me for coming to see, are you, father?"

And one white round arm was thrown fondly round Dr. Merle's shoulders, as the questioner bent forward to look in his face.

The girl was young and beautiful—of the delicately fair order, slender and lithe in form, with curling hair, golden brown, complexion like a pale rose, and features chiseled in classic mold. Her voice was low, sweet and caressing; her eyes were of a soft and tender blue, and her expression was loving and gentle.

She was the pearl of daughters, thought he whom she caressed, and his reproach of her vigils and her care melted into loving tenderness as he returned her expressions of affection.

"But you must retire now, my dear child," he said. "I can not let you risk your health by remaining a late watcher."

"Come you then too, dear father."

"Not yet. I have to wait for Ulric."

"For Ulric? And where is he?"

"I have sent him on an errand."

"He can come in by the kitchen door. The window next to that is always unfastened. Why should you wait for him?"

"I must hear what he has to say when he comes."

"Then, if you must wait, dear father, let me wait with you! Say not a word; I will not leave you alone." And the fair girl drew a low chair close to Merle's seat, and placed herself in it, leaning on him so that she could look up into his face.

He passed his hand caressingly over her waving hair.

"My darling—my own Helen!" he murmured, tenderly.

"I want to ask you something, dear papa! I have long wished for an opportunity."

"What is it, little one?"

"You have not been well for some time, I have seen it. You have lost appetite lately, and you often grow so pale when you are sitting quietly here. There is a great change, father, since last summer."

He made no reply.

"Am I not right, dear father?"

"I fear you are, my child."

"Then, why—why—do you not go to the great city and consult some eminent physician?"

"Because it would be of no use."

"Why not?"

"I know enough to be sure of it. I have studied my own symptoms. In disorders of the brain—"

"Father!" exclaimed the maiden, catching his arm, and looking at him with blanched face.

"Do not be alarmed, child. It is nothing sudden," said the doctor, again smoothing the golden hair. "But it is time you should know all; and I have had many warnings that my time may be short. I have long felt it my duty to talk to you. Helen, my love—There—do not sob."

The girl wept bitterly, pressing her face against his arm.

"Helen, you must be a brave girl, and help to keep up my courage. I may have need of you before long."

"Father, if you are ill, let us go to the seashore. You were so well, and we were so happy by the sea!"

"In Texas, you mean?"

"Oh, yes, papa; it was better than this—much better!"

"I promise you to go from this place if I am worse. In any case, we shall not be here long."

The girl's eyes flashed joyously.

"It is a gloomy home for you, child, and I do not mean to stay in it."

"Oh, dearest papa, I am so glad!"

"There is something more, Helen, which I have long wished to say to you. It ought to have been said long ago."

"What is it, dear father?" urged the girl, clinging closer to him.

"You do not remember your first home, my child. That was in Paris."

"In Paris?"

"No—you were too young to recollect it. Let me tell you of it. I was a medical practitioner in Paris; it was—let me see—some fourteen years since when I was sent for to attend a lady in the Rue St. Honore. I found her far gone in consumption; she died within ten days. The nurse—Margaret—"

"Margaret—our Margaret?" cried the girl, in surprise.

"Yes, dear, this same faithful creature who has been with us so long. And—Helen—I must tell you a secret I have too long kept from you. You are not my child."

"Father!—your child?" exclaimed Helen, starting from her seat.

"Only in love, dear one! Your mother—I believe that poor sick lady was your mother—commended you to my care—and I promised to keep you as my own until I found your real father. You were then about three years old."

"Not your daughter? Oh, papa!" and the weeping girl hid her face on Merle's knee.

"Margaret had been engaged by the lady after she had been left alone and became ill—and Margaret never knew her husband. She only knew he had sailed for South America. The suffering mother bound me by a promise to try to find her child's surviving parent. She gave Margaret the ample store of gold left with her. After her death, we crossed the ocean."

"Who is my father?" demanded the agitated girl.

"The lady's name was Madame St. Hillare. Her husband was a South-American merchant. She was English; it is from her you have your blonde hair and complexion. Some cruel calumny and evil counselors brought about separation between your father and mother, and he returned to his own country, leaving his wife in Paris, where she fell into a rapid decline. It is a sad story, dear child."

"Go on"—the girl faltered, her voice broken by sobs.

"I have little more to tell. In the years since I have spared no pains to discover this St. Hillare. Leaving you in Texas, I traveled over the States, but could hear nothing. A rumor that a South-American merchant had settled in California brought us here. My inquiries have elicited nothing; and we may soon leave this country."

"To go whither?"

"To the States—to New York, or to Paris. It is the same to me. I have enough to live on, in our humble way, and we have always been happy, have we not?"

"Oh, yes—but if you are not my father!"

"I love you as my own child; and I shall keep my promise to your dead mother to take care of you while life is mine. But my health

is uncertain, and I ought to prepare and forewarn you, my child. You may discover your father yet—though my research has been in vain."

"Do you think I would leave you?"

"I hope not, I trust not. I pray that your hand may close my dying eyes. But you must not be unprepared for any change. Your father must have been a wealthy man, and he would surely be proud of his daughter."

"I would not live with a man who was so cruel to my mother! I want none of his wealth. I would stay with you, even if he were found."

"So you should, if you wished, dear child. I know you love me."

"Do I not, my own dear papa?" and the girl clasped his hand in both hers, and again hid her weeping face on his knee.

"Come, Helen, you have nothing to grieve for, and my mind is now easy. Stay; here is something you must have."

He rose, went to the cabinet, and having unlocked it, took out a small casket, which he opened. Taking a gold locket suspended on a fine gold chain of peculiar workmanship, he gave it to Helen, still seated in her low chair in a dejected attitude.

"This is yours, Helen; I have always believed it contains your mother's picture."

He threw the chain over her neck; then, sitting down, he took the locket and pressed the spring that fastened it. It flew open. The miniature within was delicately painted on ivory, and was that of a young woman, very fair, with curling hair. There was no resemblance to Helen in the features, delicate and regular as they were.

"You must wear this at all times," said Dr. Merle, "for it may unexpectedly lead you to discover this was one of several little trinkets left in Margaret's care. She keeps the others for you; there is a wedding-ring with a date on it; a ruby and pearl brooch, and a jeweled watch. She shall deliver them to you; but this you must wear at all times."

Helen took the locket, closed it, and put it in her bosom.

"Now you must really go, my sweet child. I can not allow you to stay, for I want to see Ulric alone, and he will be here in an hour or so."

"Papa," said Helen, "I do not like that Ulric. There is something treacherous about him."

"I do not think so, my dear child. He is rough and uncouth, but he has served me faithfully."

"He has been with us six months. I am afraid of him. Oh, papa, send him away!"

"Why have you seen any thing in his conduct to make you suspicious, Helen?"

"Enough at all times. He watches you so. He is always examining your books when you are out."

"He is a student. I find him quick and obedient; trustworthy too, as far as I can see. Has he ever failed in respect to you, my child?"

"Oh, no, but he quarrels with Margaret. I have heard him speak savagely to her."

"She has only told me what he has said. I will improve him. Try to bear with the rest, Helen. He is a valuable assistant. Now, good-night. To-morrow we will talk over our plans."

He laid his hands solemnly on her head and mentally invoked a blessing. Helen threw her arms round his neck, wishing him good-night, and obediently left the room.

To reach her own, she had to pass through that of Margaret, her former nurse, who was sitting up late, shading the lamp with her hand, the young girl stood a few moments gazing on the quiet sleeper, and in her heart she blessed her for her fidelity to her suffering mother.

Then, entering her own room, she extinguished her light, and knelt long in fervent prayer before she sought her bed.

CHAPTER III.

THE SPY.

For more than two hours Ulric rode on eastward, following the stranger, and now and then coming within sight, but keeping himself carefully out of view. The bank of the river, along which the narrow road led, was covered with wild oats, and at intervals were scattered tall and spreading live-oak trees, luxuriant in their dark and glossy verdure.

Now and then the rider skirted an extensive plain, a pasture in all seasons for the wild cattle—the elk and deer of the primeval forests—which, in dry weather, seek the vicinity of the marshes of the lowlands.

Across the stream stretched vast fields, cultivated here and there, or given up to the soft grass on which herds fed; behind them was the coast range, like a continuous ledge of granite, destitute of vegetation, with an occasional peak shooting above the gray battlements, on which the evening moon poured her top light.

On the right, at length, they passed a fort, built of adobe or unburned brick. There was no light to indicate the presence of any living person; and not even the call of a sentinel was heard. Shortly after the fort, a spacious field spread out its luxuriant verdure, flanked by the ditches and embankments constructed to prevent the intrusion of cattle. Most of the country in this section was of agricultural value, and was well cultivated.

There was a rancho on the river-border, to which belonged an old ferry; and close to the water was a dilapidated tent, sheltered by a tree, one-half of which was scathed and withered by fire. Still no one was visible; and the assistant of Dr. Merle began to wonder how much further his pursuit was to continue.

All at once the rider turned into a lane on the left, closely shadowed by thick trees. A few rods further on a fence crossed the path, and bars were seen. The foremost equestrian dismounted to let them down. Ulric leaped from his horse; but did not attempt to lead him through the bars. He tied him securely to a strong oak sapling, effectually concealed from the view of any passer-by, and followed the rider on foot more than half a mile. This was easy, as the horse went at a slow pace; and Ulric ventured nearer than he had yet dared to do.

Suddenly the horse stopped. The rider had caught sight of him.

"Boy!" called out a clear, musical voice.

Ulric made no answer, but shrunk into the dark shadow of the bushes on the roadside.

"Come out, boy, if you do not want to be fired upon!" cried the voice again. "What do you mean, skulking like that?"

Young Boyce stepped out into the faint moonlight. He had taken up his line of defense.

"What are you doing here, child? Why do you muffle up your face in that manner? What are you afraid of?"

With a feeble whine, the supposed boy wimpers a piteous appeal.

"A beggar—in want of a lodging? Who are you, child?"

"A poor boy—from Sutter's fort last, sir."

"Where are you going? How far have you been following me?"

"Only from the road. I was looking for a shed, sir."

"For what?"

"To sleep in. I always sleep in sheds or barns."

"And what do you do in the daytime, child?"

"I sing at the log-taverns or ferries, sir."

"Poor little fellow! Well, you may come with me. I will give you a place to sleep in."

He was evidently taken for a child from his low stature. Touching his cap with another whine of thankfulness, he pulled his cloak tightly round him, and followed close at the horse's heels.

About a third of a mile further on the lane terminated at a gate, made of split, stout sapplings, intercepted further progress. The rider sprang from the horse, and tapped lightly with the whip upon the rustic stockade. The gate was unfastened by some one within, and swung open noiselessly. The man bowed as he saw who had come, took the bridle of his horse, and made way for the rider to pass in.

"You may take care of this boy," said the

disguised lady. "He can have supper, and sleep in the kitchen."

She went on, and entered the house by a side-door. Ulric followed the man to the stables, where he cared for the horse, and then went into the kitchen. The house, it could be seen, was one of the better sort of dwellings attached to the ordinary farms of the country. It was built of heavy logs on a foundation of rough stones, but had two stories, and glazed windows of large size in each. The yard was extensive and shaded by stout old oaks; the outbuildings were substantial and neat. The man was manifestly like Ulric, a half-breed of the Indian and Anglo-Saxon, so many of whom came from New Mexico. Slinging the saddle over his shoulder, he went from the stables to the house, bidding his companion to follow him.

"Who lives here?" asked Boyce, in his soft, light voice, anxious to obtain all the information he could, under cover of his supposed youth.

"Paul Sloman. Have you never heard of him?"

"Never, sir."

"You must be a stranger in these parts."

"I have been here a very short time. Mr. Sloman! Is he from the East?"

"Yes, he came from Louisiana."

"Is the young gentleman his son, then?"

"Not exactly." The man laughed. "How inquisitive you are for a little shaver like you! Come on; you want something to eat, I'll be bound."

He led the way into a spacious kitchen. It was low-ceiled and unplastered; but had its dark-smoked rafters hung with dried fruits. More than one pair of deer's antlers projected from the walls, and were loaded with articles of clothing. The broad shelves of a dresser were covered with household utensils of copper and tin, none of which evinced good housekeeping in careful scouring. A barrel on the wall was covered with a variety of supply of beer or cider. In a huge open chimney large logs were smoldering, and the shadows were partially dispelled by the ruddy glow of the coals. A heap of buffalo-skins in another corner was pleasantly suggestive of a good bed.

The man lighted a tallow candle, and set out on the table some meat and bread, with a mug of foaming cider. "Fall to, youngster," he said, and Ulric seated himself at the table.

"Is that your manners, boy?" cried his entertainer, when he saw him eagerly devouring the good cheer without removing his cap or cloak. As he spoke, he snatched the first from his head and flung it on the floor.

As Ulric started up, and tried to recover his head-gear, his cloak fell from his shoulders.

"Hullo!" exclaimed the servant, stepping back in genuine surprise, then bursting into ungracious laughter. "It is not a boy, after all!"

Ulric's swarthy visage and masses of black hair made him appear older than he was in reality.

"An astounding beggar—singing for a living!" repeated the man. "Why, you might make a fortune exhibiting your bushy phiz and your squat broad stern for an overgrown cub, and the stock-in-trade wouldn't run out!" He laughed coarsely, and pushed his hands toward his guest, who had assumed his seat.

"You've a small voice for such broad shoulders!" he went on, while he shoveled the meat and bread down his own throat. "More cider, eh?"

"Done supper?" Well—it's late for a stroll, and you may turn in here." He threw open the door of a small room, a sort of pantry, beside the kitchen chimney. There was a straw pallet with a buffalo-skin, and another for a couch.

Ulric went in and threw himself on the rude couch. It was not long before he knew, by the snoring of his companion, that he was fast asleep on the skins in the kitchen corner.

He had now discovered as he had been commissioned to ascertain, and it was his plain duty to return to Dr. Merle. He could easily get out through the kitchen unquestioned and unheard. The house was still; all were wrapped in slumber. He had only to steal out and climb over the stockade gate, if he could not get it open.

But he had his own curiosity to gratify, and his own plans to accomplish. He thought of the doctor awaiting his return with a sneer, and of the glimpse of the pallid face lifted in alarm, remembered that he would no doubt catch a reprimand for disobedience.

Putting on his mantle and cap, he cautiously opened the door and entered the kitchen. The man on the couch was just about to start, to see the way out; and the stentorian breathing of the serving-man showed that he would not be easily awakened.

On the other side of the kitchen a door opened on a narrow stairway. Ulric lighted the remnant of candle with a coal, and shading it so as not to awaken the sleeper, went up this ascent, closing the door carefully after him.

He came into a loft, where a number of barrels were stacked in one corner. Before him was a narrow passage leading to another part of the house. He passed through this without hesitation. It was long, and seemed to extend the entire width of the house.

At the far end the door was closed, and there was a glimmer of light beyond. Ulric found that it was bolted on the other side; but there was a crevice wide enough for the insertion of a bit of stiff wire taken from his pocket, by which he could be unlocked.

He ventured on, he extinguished his candle. There was a light rustling of garments, and through the slip he saw a woman's figure in a white night-dress, carrying a small lamp. It was the figure of a female figure was reaching. He remembered that he would no doubt catch a reprimand for disobedience.

There was a large room, unfurnished with bed or curtains; apparently a mere ante-chamber. Ulric followed the receding figure into the adjoining apartment.

This was a bed-chamber luxuriously furnished. A large bedstead of black walnut, with high posts, was hung with curtains of white dimity fringed with blue; the window-hangings were to correspond. A toilet table draped with white muslin, covered with essences, brushes, etc., stood under an oval mirror framed in clustering folds of rose-colored and white drapery. Two lighted wax candles were on the table, and two easy-chairs stood near, in one of which the figure was reaching. It was not the one who had been bearing the lamp. She had gone into another room, communicating with this by folding-doors, that stood partly open.

Ulric dared not advance; and from the spot where he stood he could be readily seen by any one coming from the interior room.

Quickly he glided behind the hangings of the bed, slid under it, and then drew himself noiselessly over the top of the bedstead, and thence to the door. Here he had every advantage of observation.

He could see a bed in an inner room, with large white ruffled pillows, and counterpane of silk patchwork. He could see a small stand, covered with a white cloth, near the head of the bed, and the outline of a face framed in iron-gray hair, pale almost as the sheet that covered the invalid's form. The face was that of a man, strongly lined, and wasted by illness.

The white-robed figure Ulric had seen carrying the lamp came out with it in her hand, and placed it on the toilet-table. At the same time she whispered to the lady seated in the easy-chair, who immediately changed her position, so as to be out of the view of any one in the sick man's room. This brought her yet nearer to the bed under which the spy was concealed.

He had now a full view of the lady, whose voice, when she spoke to her attendant, he recognized as that of the rider who had given him the clue to the house. She had thrown off her disguise, boots and all, and stood in a loose cashmere dressing-gown, white bordered with crimson. She seemed in the early prime of life, perhaps from thirty to thirty-five years of age, looking much older than in her masculine attire. Her features were regular and aquiline in outline; her complexion was a dark olive; her cheeks were flushed with a rich

color; her purplish black hair was uncoiled, and hung loosely over her shoulders. The feature that inspired most awe and admiration was her eyes. They were really wonderful eyes; long, large, black as midnight, and shaded by thick, dark lashes. When she unfolded them, it was as if a flash of sunlight had broken from a cloud; and it was a relief when the heavy lids again drooped over them.

"You have not given him the medicine," she said to the other woman, after she had moved her seat.

"It is not time; it is yet an hour before the medicine was to be given," was the low-toned answer. "What you brought is on the stand."

"I wonder if its effects would be speedy," muttered the lady, speaking to herself. "Thirty drops, the old druggist said! Did you prepare the night drink, Louise?"

"Certainly, madam, as you directed."

"There would have been no hurry, if the old quack had not found me out!" exclaimed the lady, musingly. "Now I dare not risk any thing! It would not do to have a stir made, even if I were away."

"She is thinking of the medicine my master gave her," muttered the intruder. "I wonder if murder was intended, as he thought?"

Suddenly the lady started from her reclining position.

"Louise! Louise! I am tired of this!" she exclaimed.

"You have had a long ride, madam. You had better take your tea and go to bed."

"I don't mean the journey! I am tired of this kind of life! They all work too slowly! I mean to change every thing! Poverty and all that does not suit me. If I could go to the city and send out the papers myself! I must do something! If I can not raise money, I shall go to the mountains. You must have every thing packed to-morrow, so that I may start, should it be necessary, at a moment's notice. I have sent for Inerados to meet me to-morrow morning." She spoke all this rapidly, in an undertone.

"Hush!" whispered Louise. "Did not master speak? I thought I heard him say 'Olivia.'"

Both started to their feet.

"Paul did not speak!" said the lady, who had flung back her hair to listen intently.

She paced the room two or three times; then stood looking at her own reflection in the mirror.

"Louise," she said, laughingly, "by this time next year you may see me wearing a crown."

"Madam?"

"Yes—the crown of beauty, fashion and wealth. That is Olivia's ambition! The plot is maturing; though so slowly, ah me! As soon as it is ripe, I shall enter on my kingdom. I shall be the mistress of a quarter of San Francisco! Don't stare at me in that stupid way! Do you think me a dreamer?"

"Oh, madam; but you may be too sanguine."

"Pshaw! I should have realized a fortune already, had I been free! But a married woman is so dreadfully hampered! She can not sign a deed herself. Her husband's name must go to every thing; and Paul is so scrupulous! What do you mean?"

Louise was making earnest gestures, imploring silence. Her mistress came close to the bed, and listened again.

"No, I tell you, Paul did not speak. But I thought I heard some one breathing close by."

The situation of the spy became critical. What way of escape should he take in case of discovery? To go back by the rooms he had passed through, would be difficult in the dark; and an alarm would rouse the man in the kitchen, to intercept his flight. He had heard the grating of tree boughs against a window of the interior room, and a bold thought occurred to him.

Both the women were listening.

The mistress whispered:

"Get me the pistol from the bureau drawer. I think some one is under the bed."

"Oh, no, it can not be! How could any one get there?"

"Give it me! I will kill any one who dares spy on me! Quick! I hear breathing distinctly!"

The voice of the serving-woman was steady, and there was a pained expression in her face.

"Dangerous to possess? Pout!"

"Ay, but it is so, mistress."

"Yes," inserted the African, bluntly, "it is dangerous."

"But, why is it dangerous? Tell me that."

"It has always been fatal to the one holding it, my mistress; and I wondered, while I dared not protest, that your mother should wish you to find it and keep it."

"But, had my mother lived, she would have found it, and kept it?"

"True—she would," admitted Zetta; "but it is a fatal possession, my mistress, believe me. It has always brought trouble to its possessor."

"Death sometimes," supplemented Gael; "For a third time, a trembling shiver crept over Zetta."

"Put it away. Let me keep it. I will hide it; and then, perhaps, Zuelo Nanez may be saved from its evil spells."

"Evil spells? You talk like a crazy woman! No; I will keep it. Spells? Ha! ha! ha! I am not so superstitious. But, tell me—who is, or was, Carline Mandoro?"

"After hesitating a moment, Zetta said: 'She was one of those who died because of possessing the jewel.'"

"So, Carline Mandoro, at one time, held this star of diamonds?"

"Yes."

"Do you mean to say that it caused her death?"

"Yes."

"How did she die?—in a fit? Was she drowned?—poisoned?"

"She fell by the hand of an assassin, mistress—she was stabbed."

The interruption came tremulously, and Zetta made another attempt to thrust the star into the box.

Zuelo herself could not prevent the chilly sensation which passed over her at the announcement. But she said, presently:

"Tell me more of this Carline Mandoro."

"We know no more," came quickly from the African.

"That is a falsehood! You are hiding something from me. Come, speak out. You are both sworn, of your own free will, to be faithful to me, and do my bidding. I command you to tell me more about this star—its history. And tell me, too, who Carline was!"

At that juncture the fancy clock on the mantelpiece struck the half-hour after ten. Gael pointed toward it, and looked at his young mistress, while he said:

"The time is sounding. See—Zuelo Nanez must not forget her duty. The Green Shadow."

Without a word, Zuelo arose and hurried from the room. But she carried the star of diamonds with her, despite the protestations of her serving-woman.

"It will be the death of Zuelo Nanez, as it was of others before her," Zetta said, slow and thoughtfully, and gazing toward the door through which her mistress had vanished.

"Yes, it is a cursed talisman of evil, wrought by the prompting of Satan," added Gael, also looking in the direction of the door.

CHAPTER IV. MET AND MATCHED.

As Cortez Mendoza uttered the words signifying that he had not come upon an idle mission, he eyed Helene Cery keenly, with a look of confidence in his dark face and a grin smile wreathing the corners of the mouth beneath his long mustache.

"Cortez Mendoza, you are a brave man," she said, at length.

He bowed.

"Do you know what danger you are in?"

"Danger?" he repeated, elevating his brows, and molding his lips to a circle.

"Yes, danger. Your life is threatened."

"Malediction! No?"

"Ay, but you shall see, if you disregard what I say."

"And what is that?"

"Begone, instantly."

"Ho! Begone, eh?"

"Go, sir, before you feel my claws—"

"The claws of a cat?"

"No matter. Go, now."

"Bah!" he growled, shifting his position, "I am here on business—not to run away again. I am no fool."

"Beware!" There was a strange light burning in the dark orbs that were fastened on him.

"Beware! Of what?"

"Of me, Cortez Mendoza."

"Of you! Huh! I do not fear you—nor any thing."

"Nothing?"

"Malediction! Nothing."

"Not even the ghost of Carline Mandoro!"

"Carline!" he shouted, half starting up.

"Aha! you fear nothing, I see!—not even the ghost of Carline Mandoro. Ha! ha! ha!" and she laughed, mockingly, leveling a forefinger at him.

The Spaniard clenched his teeth and glared fiercely upon her.

"Leave off!" he hissed.

"I shall not. You fear the ghost of Carline Mandoro—it is plain; and why should you not? Ha! ha! But, mark: you shall fear me far more than you fear the spirit of the dead. Do you hear? Begone, now."

"No—malediction!" he snarled, striking his knee with his fist, "I will not go!" striking the other knee with the other fist, "until I make you understand that I do not fear ghost nor human!"

Then, beating on both knees, with both fists, after the manner of a pair of drumsticks, while he leaned slightly forward, and spoke, with inconceivable rapidity:

"I am Cortez Mendoza. I fear nobody, nor any thing. I am here for your answer—malediction!—after fifteen years. You have not escaped me. You had best not try to do so again. You thought me dead. But, I am alive—caramba! yes, I am alive! I want your answer. Be quick! Malediction! I am Cortez Mendoza!"

"Beware, Cortez Mendoza!—beware!" came rustling peculiarly from the tongue's end of the beauty.

"I will not! Your answer, Madame Helene Cery—your decision, between three things, in my favor: first, your hand in marriage—"

"Preposterous!"

"Or half your fortune—"

"Never!"

"Then, the Star of Diamonds! Ha! Where is the Star of Diamonds? Can you tell me that, Madame Helene Cery?"

"I can not. The Star was stolen from me fifteen years ago. But, ere this, the

one who was the thief has died. The star has always proven fatal to the possessor, if there was any truth in the story you told me, over fifteen years ago."

"Not so!" he said, quickly.

"Not so?"

"I know of one who had that star during nearly all the last fifteen years. And he is alive! Malediction!"

"Then you know where the star is to be found?"

"No matter. I know that you speak the truth, when you say that you have not got it. Next: your fortune—"

"You shall have none of it!" defiantly.

"Ho! it is you who are brave now!"—smiling in his grim, ironical way; "you are defying Cortez Mendoza. Do you not fear Cortez Mendoza?"

"It is my turn, now, to say 'beware!' Beware how you trifle with Cortez Mendoza! I know how to deal with you, I think; though I was deceived in you fifteen years ago."

"Take care!—take care!" panted Helene, while her jeweled fingers worked nervously, and she seemed about to spring upon him.

"Take care yourself!" he retorted.

"The Star of Diamonds is lost. You will not give me half your fortune. So. Now then, the last alternative: your hand in marriage."

"I would as soon wed a viper!"

"Then there would be two serpents in the nest! Malediction! You are a scorching cat. But, you are a beautiful woman; you have money; you must be the wife of Cortez Mendoza! You dare not refuse!"

"No!" she cried, "but I may escape you. Take this!" and with the words, she snatched a dagger from her bosom, and sprang forward with the blade glittering aloft—her face glowing, and the large, dark eyes afire with the emotions of hate.

But, with lightning quickness, the Spaniard drew a revolver from his pocket, and leveled it at the heart of the angry woman.

She halted before the muzzle, and her features paled, for she saw that the weapon was cocked and ready, and only a slight pressure of the finger was necessary to deprive her of life.

"Halt, there!" he snapped, sharply.

"You would kill me, eh? Come one step more, and I shall fire! See—I am prepared! I have a pistol!—Malediction! I have two pistols! Keep off, now, and from another pocket he produced another pistol, 'covering' her completely, while he settled back in his chair, with a broad, triumphant grin.

Grinding her white teeth together, Helene Cery shrunk before the frowning deadly tubes, and restored the gleaming dagger to its concealment in her bosom. But she did not drop her gaze, and the blood remounted to her cheeks, in a fresh anger at her defeat.

Cortez slipped away his weapons, but he kept a wary watch on Helene's movements now, for he saw that she was armed, and he knew her nature well enough to expect injury at her hands the very moment opportunity offered.

"Now will I go back to my bed! Caramba! if you try that trick again, there will be somebody shot! Come—your fortune, or your hand. Decide, as you promised Cortez Mendoza you would, a little more than fifteen years ago."

Helene soon recovered from the chagrin attending the defeat of her evil purpose; and with the recovery the spirit of defiance rose anew.

"You shall have neither!" she cried, "and you may do your worst! If you think Helene Cery fears you—wretch!—you are mistaken. Oh! I, in a half-frenzied tone—'give me but one chance, Cortez Mendoza, and I will rid the world of a villain!'"

"Malediction! you tigger! That villain is Cortez Mendoza, I suppose?"

"She made no return."

"But, look now," he went on, "what if I were to kill you, this minute, eh, to save my life in the future?"

"Go on! go on!" patting the carpet with one foot, straightening those bare, white arms, as she clenched her fists, and breathing hard and fast through her dilating nostrils; "go on, sir! You have pistols, and an advantage. Give me one pistol, and fight me fairly, if you dare—here, in this parlor."

"Malediction! Catch me at it! You would put a bullet in my back! No—none of that. You are not shrewd enough to beat Cortez Mendoza. But, enough. Come—you will not give me half your fortune, eh? You will not wed me, eh?"

"I would stab you at the altar!"

"Caramba! No doubt of it, if you got the chance! But you shall do one of the two things. Hark: what if I call upon the police, and say to them: 'I can show you a woman that the authorities of New Orleans would be glad to get hold of? Why? Because it was she who bribed the father of Wurt Gomez to do that which brought a curse upon his family, and afterward sent her tool on a journey to his master, the devil! Ho! Would not that be a good denouement? Excellent! And I will do it!'"

"Do it, then," she defied. "Go and tell your story. We shall fall together. For, ere the chains rattle on my wrists, I will say: 'Behold! there is Cortez Mendoza; he, too, has something to account for, in the city of New Orleans! Ask him if he knows aught of Carline Mandoro! Let him tell you who she was, and what to him, and what became of her! Ha! ha! ha! you see, it is share and share alike. What will Cortez Mendoza answer, after I have told all, when the authorities question him regarding Carline Mandoro?"

"Fiends devour Carline Mandoro!" bel-lowed Cortez, jumping from his chair.

He strode restlessly to and fro, pulling savagely at the ends of his mustache. But he kept beyond the reach of Helene Cery, and watched her closely, notwithstanding his excited state of mind, for he saw that, as he rose to his feet, the beauty's hand glided to her bosom, and he knew that she was grasping the hilt of her sharp dagger.

As Cortez Mendoza started up, a vivid flash of lightning entered at the back window, half blinding them, followed by a terrific clap of thunder, that jarred the room.

Involuntarily he stepped to this window, to draw the curtains.

"Caramba! What a flash. Why do you not keep your windows darkened in a storm like this? You may defy Cortez Mendoza, but you can not defy the lightning. I—ha!"

He wheeled suddenly, as he detected the rustle of a dress and a quick step behind him.

And none too soon. With incredible swiftness Helene had bounded toward him, dagger in hand; and he was just in time to

grasp her wrist, and avert the deadly blow she aimed at him.

Simultaneous with this tableau, a loud, long shriek of terror rung through the hall, and Eloise, her face white in fear, came running in.

A dozen steps, and she sunk to the floor in a swoon.

"Malediction!" exclaimed Cortez, whose nerves rose on edge when the curdling scream penetrated his ears.

And then, as he glanced in the direction of the doorway:

"Caramba! Look!"

For he saw there a strange, startling apparition.

A female form, robed from head to foot in slim garments of green; and over the garments waved long hair, still greener, which fell below the waist. There were two glittering eyes fixed upon him, but the face had neither outline nor shape, being evidently covered by a skin of some kind, stained to a similar color with the clothes, and which hid the throat and bust.

One second the fearful thing stood there; then, with a laugh that was frigid and wild, it vanished.

A half-cry, half-howl, issued from the Spaniard's lips, and, casting off the grip Helene had fastened upon him, he dashed forward in pursuit of this human phantom, drawing a revolver at the same time.

As he passed beyond the doorway, something whizzed close to his ear. It was Helene's dagger. And she knew well how to throw the blade, for it only missed its mark by an inch, and buried its point, quivering, in the jamb.

CHAPTER V. PEDRO GOMEZ, THE GARDENER.

We take the reader back a period of fifteen years and a half, in order that we may bring out certain features and incidents that transpired at that time, which involve our characters already introduced, and which are materially essential to the proper development of our plot.

Our story now goes to New Orleans, to a date just fifteen years and six months prior to the occurrences set forth in the preceding chapters.

It was a warm day, in the early spring that comes to the Crescent City.

Situated on Esplanade street was a fine estate, the property of one Elisor Earncliffe, an American, who had resided there for many years, with no other family member than his child, whose name was Florese.

Florese was an acknowledged belle—eighteen years of age; a blonde; beautiful and accomplished.

Her greatest rival was a dark-eyed girl of about her own age, no less lovely, and whose name was Helene Cery.

Society was equally divided in admiration of the two rivals; and Florese, who was gentle and amiable, easily contented herself with her share of the praises that devotes continually poured upon her.

But in the nature of the young Helene there was a latent envy, a jealousy that grew stronger each day, and finally merged into a passionate hate, when one of her admirers—apparently detecting her feelings, and disgusted with this evidence of a desire to grasp all the laurels—deserted the stool on which he was wont to kneel in homage to the belle of the dark eyes and queenly mien.

It was not the mere desertion which piqued Helene so sorely; but, at the next soiree, he was seen delighting himself in the merry of Florese, soft glances and pleasant smile of Florese.

From that moment, Florese had a deadly enemy in the jealous Helene Cery; and the latter vowed to strike venomously, both at the recreant—whose name was Dwyer Allison—and at the beautiful Florese, who, unsuspecting of danger, ever greeted her rival cordially; and more, still held the handsome Dwyer Allison a captive.

But Helene Cery's hate, already dire enough, was doubly augmented by the discovery, which her maid brought to her one day—that Dwyer Allison and Florese were betrothed.

And it was true. From an admirer, the young man had become a lover. The attachment was mutual; for, when he proposed she accepted him, and now they were happy in the mingling of their affection and the prospect of an early marriage fête.

It was noticed that Helene had lost much of her vivaciousness. She seldom laughed, as seldom even smiled, and if either, it was forced.

For now, when she saw Dwyer Allison the affianced husband of Florese, she discovered that she had loved the man, loved him still, and wished him once more at her side.

With the combined feelings of love, hate and regret gnawing in her bosom, she cared little or nothing about the dazzle and glare of reception-halls, or for the throng that flattered her wherever she went.

Two things were constantly uppermost in her mind: her love for Dwyer, and her hate for Florese.

Such was the condition of affairs when we ask the reader's attention in this quarter—a date fifteen years and six months before the opening of our story, on the stormy night in Philadelphia.

On this bright, sunny day, Pedro Gomez, the gardener who had charge of the floral and shade grounds surrounding the residence of Elisor Earncliffe, was hard at work with his spade, and giving orders to three men who were under him in the management of the place.

While he worked, he hummed a Spanish love-song, and seemed very well contented with the fact that he was nobody but Pedro Gomez, the poor gardener.

While he hummed and worked and gave his orders, he did not observe that a woman had approached the iron railing and was gazing at him through the bronzed bars.

She was very dark of feature, with a Gipsy cast of countenance. Her eyes were brilliant and piercing in their glance. Over her shoulders and down draped a black cape of light fabric, trimmed with red, and surmounted by a hood—and in the hood a keen eye could have detected the hiding of great masses of rich hair. Around her bare, dark-hued arms were clasped fantastically, and in her chemise she wore a pin of steel beads that glittered with wonderful brilliancy.

For a long time she had been watching the movements of Pedro; and presently she called to him:

"Hey there, Pedro Gomez!"

"Hey, yourself," he answered, looking up.

"It's a grand day for the flowers you are so carefully tending."

"So it is," adding, a little gruffly, "but

what matters it to you—old Gipsy? What difference can it make to you whether it rains or shines? I warrant your pockets are full of money, from telling fortunes; and when we have money to think of, we have no thought for Nature."

"But I have no money, and I am fond of flowers, else I had not stopped to look at them, and to think how well you have made them grow."

"Take your fill of looking, then, and pass on," he said, though he spoke less harshly, for her compliment pleased him.

"Pedro Gomez, I say!" she called out a second time, after remaining silent a few moments.

"Say on, then. What is it this time? Do you not see that I am busy?"

"But I want one of those flowers that you are digging at. See—that rose with a pretty yellow tinge, and a bud beneath it. Bring it to me, if you will—and here is a golden dollar for it."

"A golden dollar!" exclaimed Pedro, inwardly. "This is some crazy woman! A gold dollar for a rose!" Then aloud:

"You shall have the rose, and I will get my dollar!"

When he had plucked the rose, and received the money, he would have returned at once to his labor. But the woman reached through the bars and caught hold of his jacket.

"Stay, Pedro; I have something to say to you."

"What can it be? Quick, then; for I am paid to work, and not to idle."

"And you are poorly paid, at that."

"It is no business of yours how much—"

"But, what if you could earn more money in less time?"

"What do you mean, Gipsy?"

"Would it not be a good thing, if you could earn in one day more than you can get with your spade in five years?"

"Ho! what a question. A fool would know enough to say 'yes' to that!"

"And you can do it, Pedro Gomez."

"I?"

"Yes."

"What riddle are you poking at me? How can it be possible for Pedro Gomez to make more in one day than he is now making in five years?"

"By performing a task that I can tell you of."

"Oh, you can tell me of it?"

"Yes. Do not talk so loud."

"She is certainly a crazy woman!" he resolved, mentally; then asked: "What is this task?"

"A service."

"Eh? The task is a service! I am to do a service."

"For my mistress. And when it is done, she will pay you in glittering gold."

"If she is a crazy woman, she knows well how to tempt me!" Pedro thought.

"I think that Pedro Gomez is the man my mistress wants," continued the strange woman. "If you will serve her, she will reward you well."

"I will serve," Gomez said, while he was wondering what it could be that this singular-spoken female desired to have him do.

"Fare away your spade, then, and come with me."

"Go with you?"

"Yes."

"How far? Now, there may be some trick in this," and he eyed her suspiciously.

"There is no trick. Do you see that high roof, above the others, some blocks from here?—there, over this way."

"See."

"Come with me to that house, and I will talk to you."

Gomez did not hesitate long. Giving some instructions to his men, he arranged his coat-sleeves so as to hide the dirt on his brawny arms, and went out at the gate.

Joining the woman, the two moved away, side by side, in silence.

Arriving at the house, they entered by a back door, and she led the way up-stairs, to one of the rooms in the second-story.

"Wait here till I return," she said, immediately leaving him alone.

Pedro was astonished.

Seating himself in one of the soft chairs, he surveyed the apartment.

Costly furniture with gilt cord fringing; long, crested mirrors; rich tapestries; carpet in which the feet sunk deeply at every step; and at one side was a unique table, containing a small desk wrought of ebony, with pearl-mosaic finish. All these told him that he was in the house of a very wealthy personage; and this, coupled with the mysterious circumstances which brought him there, increased his wonderment to a pitch of uneasiness.

He became restless; he fidgeted about on the chair; finally, he burst forth, half-aloud:

"Who is this Gipsy woman?—if she is a Gipsy woman? Who is her mistress?—if she has a mistress? And what can her mistress want with Pedro Gomez? How did she know my name? That is a question, too. Whose house am I in? It is no place for Pedro Gomez, the gardener. I shall be discovered by some of the servants, presently; and they will first break my head, then pitch me into the gutter! How long am I to sit here on this thing called a chair? A chair?—it is more like a mushroom to Pedro Gomez! Will she never come, and tell me what is wanted by that mistress of hers? Whoever she may be. That, too, is a question. Ha!—there's a step. Now, then, to see this grand lady, who will tell me how to earn more money in one day than I can get with my spade in five years! Ho! it is not possible! But, she is coming—I hear her step."

(To be continued—Commenced in No. 145.)

We give, in this week's issue, the opening chapters of

THE BEAUTIFUL FORGER;

OR,

The Adventures of a Young Girl.

BY MRS. E. B. ELLETT.

AUTHOR OF MADALINE'S MARRIAGE, ETC., ETC.

The Beautiful Forger is a woman, remarkable in many respects. She is bad and good; she is implacable in her ambition yet terribly true in her loves; she is daring, reckless and unprincipled, but bends like a lily before her own heart-struggles.

The Young Girl involved in the net which others have woven, is the very contrast in character and temper with the fierce Mistress of the Rancho, and the young man who becomes this girl's guardian and champion stands out in the drama like an Ajax.

All is so well knit in plot and incident, and so impressively told, that the serial will be read with immense satisfaction.

THE NEWSBOY.

BY J. G. MANLY, JR.

Boots on his feet, a doubtful fit.

Pleasant for him if too old for you!

Do not call him "a worthless chit."

Because in the hands of sin he grew.

From a baby cradled in sin and shame

Down in an alley damp and drear,

Till to the better life he came.

<

MARY.

BY JOHNNIE DARR.

Mary, a maiden with flowing curls,
And light as any fairy,
I see her now as I saw her then—
My little child-love, Mary.

Years have passed since we parted there;
I vowed to forget her forever;
We parted, knowing it was for years,
And perhaps might be forever.

Mary, a woman of noble form,
And a queenly grace around her,
Safe and secure, amid the storm
Of Fashion's throng, I found her.

She fair as ever; forgotten I;
Or, may be in times of sadness,
She sometimes thought of the fair-haired boy,
Whose love to her *now* seemed madness.

Mary, a white stone marks the place
Where they laid her, she my fairy,
And my heart is laid in the ground beneath
The stone that says but "Mary."

A Slight Difference.

BY MARY REED CROWELL.

"I AM determined to get a husband this season, at all events. You hear that, Rosa, I suppose? So make all your arrangements for a month, at least, at Long Branch."

Miss Myrtle Windyball looked very decisive indeed as she delivered her words; and little Rosa, Mivart bent her graceful head lower over a lace overskirt she was mending; bent down that Miss Windyball might not see the smile that rippled over her face.

Such a sweet face as it was, too—one that Miss Myrtle often envied as she gazed at it, so pure, and fresh, and girlish, with its oleander complexion, dark, hazel eyes and satin brown hair.

But, after all, it was Rosa Mivart's mouth that constituted her chiefest beauty, so perfect was it, whether shut, looking so like folded rose leaves, or a crimson Cupid's bow, or parted in laughter, or conversation, so that it disclosed even, white teeth, and brought the one deep dimple in her pink cheek.

Rosa was marvelously pretty; Rosa was poor, and she would have been homeless, friendless, moneyless, had not Miss Windyball, who was fair, fat, forty, and comfortably off, needed her for maid, traveling companion, friend. Not that Rosa enjoyed the position so very much, further than it supplied shelter, raiment, and food; for Miss Myrtle Windyball's disposition was hardly angelic.

However, there were brighter spots in Rosa's dull life of late, than darning lace overskirts, trimming and re-trimming Miss Windyball's evening dresses, and humoring all that lady's conceits.

And the bright spots were, first a series of watering-place visits, Newport, Cape May, Saratoga, and now last of all, Long Branch. Rosa liked such a life at times; why shouldn't she, young, healthy and pretty, if she never did have a dance in the saloon, or wear a better dress than a prim gray and black *crepe du chine*?

The other bright spot in Rosa's life—not least by any means because mentioned last, was Guy Delfonda.

And it was of this friend of hers—for Mr. Delfonda, a constant caller on Miss Windyball, and the owner of a hundred thousand dollars, could hardly be expected to be more than a thoughtful kind friend of a girl who earned her living—that Rosa was thinking when Miss Myrtle's words were spoken. Then Rosa looked up from her sewing.

"I will pack your trunks to-night, then, Miss Windyball. You will wear your steel-gray traveling suit? or the white linen?"

Miss Myrtle considered the matter solemnly.

"Well, between us two, Rosa, I might as well wear the silver-gray sack. It is the most becoming, I think, and affairs have come to such a pass, Rosa, that I feel as if I could not afford to lose the slightest chance. Just think of it, Rosa—this is a solemn secret—I am nearly thirty, and unmarried still."

And Rosa, who knew well enough that she was on the shady side of forty, smiled in a manner that that lady never felt quite satisfied with, for she could not tell for the life of her whether Rosa was making fun or not.

Now Rosa laughed.

"If you are, Miss Myrtle, you don't look it. Your hair and complexion are wonderfully preserved."

Miss Myrtle looked pensively in the glass.

"Ye-e-s, so they are; and, would you believe it, Mr. Delfonda never suspects I use dye and paint. Rosa, I am determined to marry Guy Delfonda this season, and that is why I'm going to Long Branch. He'll be there."

Rosa started, then shut her lips defiantly. What if Mr. Delfonda did marry old Miss Windyball? It was no one's affair but his own—at least none of hers. Then, an hour after, when she went to pack Miss Myrtle's trunks, some suspicious moisture kept dimming her sight; she hated Long Branch, for what good was it all to her, who deserved as much as other people? She hated Miss Windyball, because she was in love—no, it was Guy Delfonda she despised—after all, what need it all matter? She was only poor Rosa Mivart, and such she would be to the end of the chapter.

"Such a horrid, stuffy little room! Why, Rosa, do you suppose I could have endured it if I hadn't been kept up by the delightful fact that I was engaged—actually engaged?"

Miss Windyball smiled serenely from her uncomfortable chair, where she sat fanning, over to Rosa, who was leaning idly against the window.

"I am glad to congratulate you, and I suppose Mr. Delfonda is the happy suitor."

And at the bitterness in her voice Miss Windyball started in surprise.

"Well, upon my word! You snap at me as if I had done you a great injustice. Bless me, Rosa Mivart, I hope you're not jealous? I do hope you did not expect Mr. Delfonda to marry you?"

For all answer the fiery blushes surged over Rosa's cheeks, and Miss Myrtle went on contentedly:

"He did propose so beautifully. To tell the truth, Rosa, I thought he was a little vague, and once I actually thought he meant the offer for somebody else, and he was telling me by mistake. He is to come for his answer this afternoon. He is so thoughtful, Rosa, too, for he said he would speak to you when he came; but, of course,

he intends offering you the same position you hold, only as his wife's maid instead of Miss Windyball's. Eh, Rosa?"

For the delightful conceit sent beaming smiles all over Miss Myrtle's face, while Rosa fought so hard to keep back the tears that were too ready to come.

"You may lay out my pale-blue silk with the white lace waist and overskirt, Rosa. Guy will be here in half an hour now, and, of course, I want to be attired for the occasion. You had better wear the grenadine I gave you—it is plain and very suitable."

So Miss Windyball and Rosa Mivart awaited Guy Delfonda's call matrimonial.

A quiet-voiced, grand-faced man of thirty-five he was, with a look all over him that would have led a perfect stranger to place confidence in him. Just such a strong-hearted, proud-spirited man, that Rosa Mivart's whole soul went out to, and as she watched him up the room, oh! the dumb anguish there was in her heart, that Miss Windyball—But her thoughts were suddenly dispersed, for Mr. Delfonda, instead of going up to Miss Windyball, who awaited him all smiles and softness, in her arm-chair, crossed over to Rosa, and extended his hand.

"My darling, how can I thank you—"

"Mr. Delfonda, may I beg to know what that means?"

It was Miss Windyball's sharp, curt voice, her sharp light eyes that were going from Mr. Delfonda's face to Rosa's, that, in its astonishment, paled and flushed deliciously.

Guy turned carelessly toward his questioner.

"I can see no objections in thus addressing the lady you this morning consented to give me for my wife. I told you I should come."

A groan, the incarceration of dashed hopes, mortified surprise, and impatient anger, arrested the lover's words; and then Miss Windyball frowned out, regardless of grace or etiquette.

And Rosa had it all explained to her perfect satisfaction; while Mr. Delfonda's amazement exceeded both his betrothed's and Miss Windyball's.

Poor Miss Windyball! no wonder she had thought her suitor seemed so "vague!" She is single still, and this season is at Saratoga Springs, on her annual errand; and Mr. and Mrs. Delfonda are summering in Europe.

Rocky Mountain Rob,

THE CALIFORNIA OUTLAW;

OR,

The Vigilantes of Humbug Bar.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN.

AUTHOR OF THE "WOLF DEMON," "OVERLAND KIT," "RED MAZEPPA," "ACE OF SPADES," "HEART OF FIRE," "WITCHES OF NEW YORK," "A STRANGE GIRL," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER X.

A COLD DEAL.

For a minute or two the old man laid back in his chair and roared in the face of the Indian.

A frown gathered upon the chief's stolid features, and with an angry gesture he wound the string around the neck of the buck-skin bag which held the gold-dust and swept it from the table, in disgust.

"Ugh! Big chief talk straight; white father make fool of Injun!" and the brave rose majestically to his feet.

"Hold on! Sit down, chief; don't get riled," cried the old man, trying to appease the evidently offended savage.

"Mud Turtle no like white father to laugh," said the Indian, gravely, and he resumed his seat.

"Of course—quite correct; but I couldn't help it; meant no offense, you know," Shook explained.

"Why white father laugh at Injun?" demanded the Blackfoot.

"Well, chief, the fact is, the idea of your offering to buy my gal struck me comical."

"Chief heap poor," the Indian said, anxiously; "give white father all he can for young squaw—two Injun squaw, one pony, gold-dust—maybe chief give more dust—s'pose that buy squaw, eh?"

Oh, you offer 'nuff, chief; that ain't the p'int," the old man explained.

"Squaw sold to 'nother chief? Mud Turtle take his scalp; then buy squaw—you bet!"

The Indian had evidently used his ears since he had been hanging round the white men's camp, as this phrase proved.

"You're barking up the wrong tree, Injun," responded old Shook, good-naturedly.

"The fact is, we don't sell our squaws, as you red-skins do."

"No sell squaw?" said the Indian, slowly and in evident astonishment.

"No, we afford to keep 'em away. When they see a fellow that they want to tie to, they just spit it out to us, and then we say, 'sail in,' and the two fix the affair up."

The chief was silent for a few minutes, evidently pondering over the words of the white man; then an idea seemed to flash across his mind, and he surveyed Shook, with a beaming smile on his dusky features.

"Maybe chief know now," he said, slowly.

"Squaw want to go with chief, white father say yes, too?"

This plain and straight-forward question was a poser to Shook. He scratched his head for a moment; then he stroked his chin.

"Well," he said, meditatively.

"Ugh!" and the Indian gave a grunt of discontent. "When Injun speaks straight, white father no answer," and his tone plainly betrayed that he considered himself aggrieved.

"Look a-here!" cried the old man, suddenly; "why don't you go and get a squaw out of your own tribe?"

"Chief got two now; wants white squaw bad," was the laconic reply.

"I don't believe that the gal would have you!" Shook exclaimed, just a little impatiently.

"White father means that he would not give her to chief at all?" The savage evidently was discontented.

"Well, chief, I really own I should object."

White father no take two squaws, one pony, gold-dust—ugh!"

"We can't trade," Shook replied.

Then the Indian sat and thought for quite a long time, while the other watched him with a comical grin.

Suddenly the Blackfoot bent over and

laid his bony finger impressively on the old man's arm.

"Mud Turtle know 'nother way to get squaw."

Then, from beneath the folds of his blanket, he produced a dirty pack of cards, which he laid down on the table; then he pointed to them.

"Chief know?"

"Keerds!" and the old man nodded.

"Big Injun put two squaw, one pony, bag gold-dust up 'g'in little white squaw, play barefooted-on-top-of-head-father poker—how's that for high?"

Old Shook stared with open mouth at the savage, as he made this offer.

"What?" he said, in utter astonishment.

"Flax white father like blazes!" the Indian said, sententiously.

"The devil you will!" exclaimed the landlord, his temper rather excited.

"White father no play—no lose white squaw; play—lose white squaw every time."

Old Shook did not relish the boasting words of the Indian. In his younger days he had been a mighty man at cards, and now, for this heathen savage to coolly announce to him that he could flax him like blazes with the "papers," was more than the blood of the old man could stand.

He glanced carefully out of the window, as if he was calculating the chances of any body witnessing his movements; then he looked wistfully at the cards displayed so temptingly on the little table.

The Indian's keen eyes were fixed searchingly upon the other's face. He saw that he was yielding to the temptation, and a glitter, that told of anticipated triumph, shone in the dark eyes.

"I can't do it!" the old man muttered to himself. I've jined the church, and it's ag'in my principles to touch them devil's picture-books, but I would like to take the conceit out of this heathen, though, I swear!"

The chief noticed this indecision, and carefully took up the cards. Shuffling them a few times, he then dealt the old man five cards, then himself five, and, as he returned the pack to the table, Shook saw that the under card was the ace of hearts.

The old man's eyes followed the Indian's movements, with an eager, hungry look.

"Bet white father look at land; maybe he play chief then," the red-skin said, gravely.

"I swear I'd like to flax the heathen!" Old Pop muttered, and then, no longer able to resist the temptation, he took up the five cards and chuckled as he looked at them. He held four kings and a jack; a hand which only four aces could beat, and with his own eyes, Shook had seen that one of the aces was at the bottom of the pack on the table, therefore it was clearly impossible that the Indian could hold the four aces.

Shook looked searchingly at the savage. The Indian sat perfectly impassive; his cards lay on the table; he had not looked at them yet.

Again looking at his hand, he muttered: "I reckon that it won't be much of a sin, arter all, to take the conceit out of this pesky savage, jist for once."

"It's to be a straight game—the hands ag'in each other jist as we hold 'em?" he demanded.

The Indian gravely nodded assent.

"I'll play on one condition, chief," said Shook, suddenly, as an idea occurred to him.

"White father speak—Injun do, p'haps."

"That of I win, you'll give up your heathen religion and become a Christian?"

A slight smile played for a moment around the corners of the Indian's mouth, then he inclined his head gravely.

"Bet Injun do as white father says, if white father win."

"I really must flax him," thought the conscientious Shook.

At that moment Bob Shook and Johnny Bird entered the room, and were considerably astonished when they found the landlord of the Waterproof engaged in a little game with the Blackfoot chief, and were still more astonished when told what the stakes were on either side.

"Look out that the heathen don't flax you, father," Bob hinted in the old man's ear.

"He can't do it," whispered the old man.

"It will take four aces to beat me and I seed one on 'em at the bottom of the pack."

"Maybe he let you see it on purpose and has run in a 'cold deal' on you."

"I tell you I seed it plain enough; I ain't a flat," the old landlord retorted, quite angry.

"White father ready, chief ready too," and the Indian seized up his cards.

"I'm ready; now it's a good fair game; you'll pay off you lose?" Old Shook quivered, trembling with excitement.

"Chief pay—white father pay too?"

"Yes; there—four kings!" Shook slapped the cards down, in triumph, and reached for the bag of gold-dust, which the Indian had again placed upon the table.

"Wait!" said the Indian, laconically, covering the bag of gold-dust with his broad hand as he spoke. "Injun rake pile," and he deliberately laid four aces down on the table!

Shook grew scarlet with rage, and with a howl, he made a dive for the pack, turned up the bottom card, and it was the tray of hearts; the Indian had ingeniously concealed the two end spots with his thumb and finger when he had purposely let Shook see the card, so that the center spot alone being visible, it had appeared to the old man as the ace of hearts.

With a wolf-like yell, Bob Shook went over backward in his chair, as if he had suddenly been seized with a fit, while Johnny Bird prettily near strangled himself in trying to swallow the table-cloth.

Old Shook, with the tray of hearts clutched in his fist, stood in the center of the room, a picture of despair.

The Indian rose and folded his blanket around him, with an air of quiet dignity.

"Come for squaw by-and-by," he said, and then stalked out of the house.

We regret to say that for full five minutes, old Pop Shook forgot that he had experienced "grace," and swore like a trooper, and then only regained possession of himself by seizing a barrel-stave and driving Bob and Johnny Bird, who were laughing like a couple of lunatics, out of the house.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COLONEL'S TROUBLE.

THE sun rose bright and early on the morning following the day when we first took up the tangled skein of life in the Humbug valley.

Colonel Jacks and Doc Kidder happened to meet in front of the Waterproof saloon.

Their errand was the same—a morning "cocktail," compounded by Old Shook's skillful hand, to impart an appetite for breakfast.

Colonel Jacks was nervous and shaky; the lines on his face were deeper and sterner than ever, and his eyes were restless and bloodshot.

Kidder, on the contrary, looked as if he had just come out of a handbox; his complexion was fresh and rosy, his mustache carefully waxed, and his step as elastic as a boy of twenty. Yet, Kidder was an older man than the veteran soldier, and had been up all night, too, indulging in a "little game" with some of the "sharps" from Get-up Gulch and Poor-shoot City, and, to the credit of the Bar, be it said, Kidder had succeeded in flaxing the strangers out of all their loose gold-dust, and had sent them back to their respective homes in figurative sackcloth and ashes.

"Good-morn'g, colonel," cried Kidder; "where you bound so early?"

"Going to get a little bitters before breakfast," the old soldier replied, hoarsely and nervously.

"See here, my dear colonel, you seem out of sorts this morning," and the gambler laid his hand on the shoulder of the other.

"I'll be cursed if you ain't right, Kidder," the colonel cried, with a hollow laugh; "some fine morning the Bar will wake up and find that I've given 'em a chance to start a first-class grave-yard. I say, Kidder, it's cursed hard that a man who ought to have died on some battlefield, paying his debt to the country that educated him, should peg out like a miserable coyote in some rotten old shanty up in the mountains."

"Oh, not so bad as that, colonel; you're only a little nervous this morning, that's all."

"I tell you, sir, that this worthless old carcass won't waste good victuals much longer," the other said, dogmatically. "I say, Kidder, do you ever sleep?" he asked, suddenly.

"Why, of course," Kidder replied, switching some dust off the sleeve of his coat with his handkerchief. "How the deuce do you suppose I manage to live?"

"You generally play cards all night."

"Ah, true, but then I sleep all the next day. Gentlemen who follow my trade for a living, are like owls—we prey by night and sleep by day."

"Kidder!" cried the old soldier, suddenly. "I envy you!"

"Do you? Why?" the gamester asked, in astonishment. "Men who trust to cards and dice to give them their daily bread are not generally objects of envy."

"Kidder, fortune has a devilish sight more to do with men in this world than most people imagine," Jacks said, bitterly.

"Now, take yourself, for instance; what made you what you are—a gambler?"

"Well now, my dear colonel, that is what a lawyer would call a leading question. There's not many men at the Bar who would think of putting such a question to me, and precious few of them would get an answer."

"You couldn't answer me if you don't like," said the old soldier, bluntly.

"Colonel, I should deem it an honor to answer any question that you might put to me," Kidder returned, quite seriously.

The soldier looked the gambler straight in the eyes for a moment, then extended his hand to him, and said, impulsively:

"I believe you, sir; I believe you, sir!"

"When I was about thirty years old I occupied a pretty responsible position, East; I got into difficulty and had to emigrate. From the force of circumstances I was obliged to find refuge in some country where no extradition treaty with the United States existed. I selected Brazil. A delightful country—snakes, scorpions and fever. The latter broke me all to pieces. My money gone, and without friends, I nearly starved. Chanced me to one of the sailor drinking-houses frequented by foreigners. I saw the sailors gambling. I had always been an adept at all card games, for the fun of the thing, of course; and now I saw a chance to make a living; my health was so bad that I couldn't do hard work. Then and there I became a gambler, and have continued one ever since. I could easily defend my occupation by crying out that everybody gambles in this world, more or less, but that is only mere sophistry, springs to catch woodcocks."

"Kidder, you're a philosopher!" exclaimed the colonel, laying his heavy hand upon the shoulder of the other. "How many men would rest content as you have done? As for me, I kick against the traces all the time. Kidder, I believe that I've been the greatest fool that ever existed; curse me if I don't!"

"Colonel, do you know that I've thought that way myself, a great many times, and from the little experience I had, I've come to the deliberate conclusion that almost every man thinks about the same thing of himself, sooner or later in his life."

"Dr. Jove, sir, I believe you're right!" cried the colonel, emphatically. "Kidder, do you sleep?" he again demanded, suddenly.

"Why, of course; I should be in my grave if I didn't."

"Curse me if I can; I mean, sleep as I used to when I was a young man. Now, sir, I have the most terrible dreams."

"Dreams!" Kidder ejaculated, and he flicked a dust-patch off his polished boot as he spoke. "I dream sometimes, but don't take much stock in dreams, colonel. I remember once I dreamed that I ought to back the jack of spades the next time I tried a hack at faw. I dreamed the same dream three times, colonel, and that, they say, surely signifies that it will come true. Well, colonel, I backed the jack of spades, and I lost two thousand dollars before I got through. I really consider that dreams are humbugs, colonel."

"I don't dream of the future, Kidder; I dream of the past," the colonel exclaimed, solemnly.

"The past?"

"Yes; all my past life comes back to me the moment I close my eyes. I go through all my trouble again. In the daytime I manage to forget all about it—so I do at night, for that matter—but the moment sleep comes, the phantoms of memory rise to haunt me." The troubled face of the old officer showed how deeply he was affected.

"Well, now, if I was going to prescribe for you, colonel, I should say, take a good stiff run-punch before you turn in, and if one ain't enough, repeat the dose. I don't wonder, sometimes, at men becoming drunkards. Liquor does dull the brain,

there's no question about that. It's a sort of mental suicide, though. It will break a man down in the end."

"Kidder, I never lay my head upon my bunk without being drugged with liquor. I'm pretty near a wreck, Kidder, and a woman has been my rock ahead."

"The deuce you say!" exclaimed Kidder, in astonishment.

"Yes; a woman with the face of an angel and the heart of a fiend. By Jove! Kidder, men wouldn't be half the villains they are if the women would only let them alone!" The colonel spoke with fierce emphasis.

A horseman riding up the street interrupted the conversation.

The stranger was a young man of perhaps two and twenty, mounted on a superb black horse. He was a handsome fellow, with jet-black hair and eyes, and a face almost as soft and fair as a woman's.

The colonel grasped the arm of Kidder in intense excitement as his gaze fell upon the stranger.

"Heavens!" he cried, breathlessly; "that boy is the very image of my wife!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE HEATHEN CHINEE.

"Your wife!" exclaimed Kidder, in astonishment.

"Yes; the she-devil who ruined all my life and made me the wreck that I am!" The colonel spoke very bitterly.

The horseman dismounted, gave his animal in charge of the hostler, and entered the saloon.

"It's a wonderful resemblance!" exclaimed the old soldier, as the door closed behind the stranger.

"Looks like your wife, eh?"

"Yes; she was a young girl of French extraction that I married in New Orleans about twenty-seven years ago. She ruined me and then fled with a young French creole to Texas. I was stationed then at old Fort Arbuckle, on the Canadian river. I was in command of the

a strange voice close by the stranger's side. He looked up and saw that the Chinaman had approached and stood by the table, with a broad grin upon his olive face.

"No, thank you, John; I've got all I want," the young man replied. On the Pacific Slope all natives of the celestial nation bear the common name of John.

Then the movements of the almond-eyed son of the flowery nation excited the wonder of the young stranger. The Chinaman crept cautiously to the door, listened for a moment, then returned to the table and bent down mysteriously.

"Wantee see 'Melican man Talbee?" This was as near as the celestial could come to the name of Injun Dick.

"Yes!" exclaimed the young man, eagerly. "What you give me?" asked the Chinaman, shrilly.

The young man took a gold dollar from his pocket and held it up. "Me teller for doller," the celestial said, tersely.

"Go on."

"Melican man callee heself Smithee." Rimee nodded to let the heathen see that he understood him. As the young man had guessed, Talbot had been passing under an assumed name.

"Givee doller!" and the Chinaman extended his hand.

Hold on a moment, my friend," Rimee said, holding the coin out of the reach of the other, "you haven't quite earned your dollar, yet. Where is this man now?"

The celestial hesitated for a moment.

"Me don't knowe," he replied, at last.

Rimee was convinced from the manner of the man that he was not speaking the truth. He did not say so, but quietly returned the dollar to his pocket-book and commenced eating again.

The Chinaman heaved a deep sigh when the gold-piece disappeared. Then he went to the door and listened again, then came back.

"Me do knowe; me 'fraid teller," he said, in a whisper.

"Speak and the dollar is yours." And again Rimee held the yellow gold-piece up before the eyes of the celestial.

"Me teller," the Chinaman said, decidedly, but with a cautious glance around him. Go ahead then and be quick," Rimee said, impatiently.

"Melican man, face hidee—throwe lasso—take Talbee 'way off in mountains."

Rimee started in amazement at this intelligence fell upon his ears. If the heathen spoke the truth, Talbot was in the hands of the road-agents!

"How do you know that this is so?" the young man asked, sternly. The thought occurred to him that perhaps the wily son of the East was lying in order to possess himself of the gold dollar.

"Chinee man come 'long road—see 'Melican man hidee—he hidee too. No like 'Melican man's face hidee. See muchee—no teller," the Chinaman said, firmly.

"How many were there with their faces hidden?"

The celestial held up three fingers.

"You are not lying?" Rimee cried, sternly.

"John no lie—how could he?" said the celestial, in an injured tone.

"There's your dollar."

The eyes of the heathen glistened as his fingers touched the gold-piece, and straightway he departed.

"Talbot must be saved, no matter what the cost!" the stranger cried, with compressed lips and an angry brow.

(To be continued—commenced in No. 152.)

The False Widow: OR, FLORIEN REDESDALE'S FORTUNE.

BY MRS. JENNIE DAVIS BURTON,
AUTHOR OF "ADRIA, THE ADOPTED," "CECIL'S DECEIT," "STRANGELY WED," "MADAME DUKAND'S PROTEGES," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XVI. A LITTLE LOVE-AFFAIR.

"How do I look, Gerry? Are these roses becoming? And my founcees—I'm such an insignificant little thing that I can't wear deep ones, but Madame Elssler draped and looped them beautifully. Do I need any thing more?"

Miss Cornelia Day turned herself slowly around for her friend's inspection. She was exquisitely dressed in pink silk and white point, with clusters of moss rosebuds in her fluffy yellow hair.

"Lovely!" ejaculated Geraldine. "Madame Elssler has taste, but one with your fair complexion can wear any thing that's delicate. Now I have to resort to the deepest hues of the rainbow—we brunettes haven't the liberty of choice you blondes can take. You do need something more, though. Hold here till I pencil your eyebrows just the least bit in the world—it gives such a piquant east to the countenance. Just a dust more of powder to take that polish off your forehead—there, now you're perfect. I believe I'd have chosen white flowers if I were you, though nothing could be sweeter than those clusters of half-opened buds."

"They just match the shade of my dress," answered Cornelia, and a blush which might have been the reflection of light from the pink silk swept over her face. The true secret of her choosing them was this: at the ball of New Year's Eve, Aubrey had been rather extravagant in his praises of Miss Redesdale's toilet in her hearing, and had especially remarked the effect of her simple decorations—clusters of moss rosebuds precisely like these. Not for the world would Miss Day have admitted that she had studied every detail of her dress with a view to pleasing his taste, or that she had maneuvered to accompany the Lessinghams from their own house that she might have a fair excuse for monopolizing Aubrey through the evening.

"Everybody will be at the opera to-night, I suppose," chattered Cornelia. "Oh, Gerry! that corn-colored moire is just heavenly; and the lace—real Chantilly, isn't it? You look like a queen, I declare. I wonder, now, what that Miss Redesdale will wear. I can't see any thing so remarkable about her that every one should be going into raptures; it must be that she's a new star in the firmament, I think."

"Oh, I dare say," answered Gerry, carelessly, but not without an inward twinge. "Does my opera-cloak need a pin there in the back? What a darling hood! Even Aubrey, who is usually so indifferent, goes into ecstasies of admiration over her. It's

shameful, and I'm very indignant at him: I've got other plans for that brother of mine, and I'll be just heart-broken if he disappoints me. Ready, Neely? There he is, the impatient mortal."

"Now, then, girls, are you coming?" called Aubrey, from the stairway. "We're sure to be late, and there'll be such a crush as we don't often see."

"Ready, brother. Oh, my fan; where is your bouquet, Cornelia? Not that handkerchief, Annette; one of my newest set. Come, my dear boy, please don't keep us waiting."

"Cool, 'pon honor, after I've been fuming for an hour. I wouldn't believe it if I hadn't made the discovery myself, but there is one of your sex in this city who can be ready for an expedition of any sort on time. You ladies, I believe, would expect the angel Gabriel to blow his trumpet a second time if you were here to be favored with the 'winding of his horn.'"

"And pray, who is your paragon of punctuality?"

"Miss Redesdale, of course."

"Of course. I might have known it. She seems to have inherited all the virtues under the sun, moon and stars. What it is to be a comet—to burst transcendent in a midnight sky! We lesser lights may blink ourselves out and never be missed. We may hide our faces behind the clouds, Cornelia; in other words, take a back seat with such good or bad grace as we can muster."

"It's always the fate of old stagers, isn't it?" murmured Miss Day, in plaintive tones. This was her third season and she was barely twenty, though looking younger. "I begin to believe what the poets say—that there is no constancy in the world."

"Oh, spare my devoted head! What unreasonable beings you girls are! There, I'm ready to cry, 'peccavi!' any thing for the sake of peace."

Quite unconscious of the small storm of resentment which the song of her praises had raised in at least two feminine breasts, Florien made her toilet for the opera. She wore mauve silk made en traine and trimmed with priceless point, with pearls upon her neck and arms, and in her waving, luxuriant hair. She held a knot of fresh violets in her gloved hands, and her fan suspended from her wrist—a dainty marvel of pearl and silk.

Mr. Arnold bestowed a look of unequivocal approval upon her as she let her snowy opera-cloak fall back, and leaned back in the private box. They were not late—they were unfashionably early in fact—and the California prince felt that if he made the declaration he had been contemplating for a week past, at last deciding to put his fate to the test this night, it must be done before the satellites that always thronged about her had an opportunity to invade their privacy. Longed for from all parts of the house were directed toward them, but as yet no one had approached. He leaned forward, feasting his eyes upon her face, rare and fair as the purest pearl.

"How fortunate that we came early!" said Florien. "Of all places to see every one you know or hope to know, commend me to the opera. It is said that there is no heart so hard but it includes a soft spot somewhere, and I think there is no soul so bleak that it has not some love of music in it."

"Ah, Miss Florien, there are some hearts and souls so filled with other love—that—that—by George! they're soft clear through, I believe. I can't make you fine speeches; it's not my way; but—but—if you'll marry me, I'll be the happiest man outside of California. I dare say I'm a blundering idiot, it's awkward and sudden, and all that sort of thing, but you see, I was afraid some other cove would cut in ahead and spoil my chance—if I have any. I can't dance or sing, or turn compliments, like these New York chaps—some of 'em—but I'd make you as good a husband. I love you, Miss Redesdale, and what's more, you're the only woman I've ever loved or asked to marry me. Will you be my wife?"

This speech, prolix for him, was a thunderbolt of astonishment to Florien. She was no coquette; she would never trifle with any man's heart, least of all one honest and sincere as this. Hugo Arnold, stripped of a little puppyism and self-conceit, for which he could be readily excused, considering the adulation showered upon him, quite sufficient to turn a stronger brain, possessed more wealth of genuine noble feeling than one out of every hundred men you meet in shallow society. Florien appreciated his sterling merit in this moment while his eyes were fixed upon her imploringly, his face flushed until it was almost handsome with enthusiasm of his subject.

She did not even hesitate in her answer, kind but firm.

"I thank you sincerely for the honor of your preference, Mr. Arnold, but I can not love you. I can give you but one answer—no. You see, I am frank, as I am sure you wish me; I do not strive to varnish my refusal, since it must be a refusal."

"But, Miss Redesdale, take time to think of it. I'm quite willing to wait, only, you see, I didn't want Tom, Dick and Harry to cut ahead. I'm not head over ears out of my depth yet, and I can be contented to let things go as they are till you've a chance to consider the points. I don't believe in fellows that are ready to die for a girl and wouldn't give up their cigars if she was to ask 'em. Now, I'd do any thing reasonable under the sun. I'd quit the club and billiard playing, and all that sort of thing, if you only say the word. I would, indeed."

"I don't doubt it in the least," Mr. Arnold. "You are just the man to make some good little girl happy one of these days. But I am not a good little girl; I am a very self-willed young lady, who—if to accept were possible—would tyrannize over you, snub you, and misuse you generally, until you'd be ready to regret your choice before the honeymoon should be passed. I'm really doing you a kindness in refusing, my dear sir."

"I'd rather have you snub and misuse me in that way than to be adored by any other girl."

"But I don't want a husband for the mere sake of misusing him. When I marry, I hope it may be a man whom I can love and revere through his being wiser, nobler, stronger than myself. Pardon me for saying it, but you are not such a man as I should choose. You would be true as a rock, and tender, but—but—Oh, it is quite impossible to explain myself. See, there are the Lessinghams, and Miss Day with them. Why don't you propose to her, Mr. Arnold? she would suit you far better than I."

The party entered an opposite box, and

recognitions were exchanged. Meeting Aubrey's glance, Florien leaned forward, and, with a wave of her fan, beckoned him to approach. He made his excuses to his sister and her friend, and sauntered over to their box.

"Your most devoted, Miss Redesdale, that is if any one could attain that distinction. Out in honor of *La Petite Louise*—she's a star of the first magnitude, they say. Arnold, do go over and keep Gerry in good humor for two minutes' time. You shouldn't grudge me that much with the whole evening before you."

The required change was effected with more alacrity on the Californian's part than he would have probably displayed a few moments previous.

"Have I succeeded in serving you, Miss Redesdale? I really imagined you wished some undesirable *contretemps* averted."

"Broken, rather. You have accomplished it even more effectually than I had meant. What will your friends think, Mr. Lessingham?"

"They will be satisfied with the exchange," he answered, carelessly. "Pray, don't banish me from your presence. Be grateful in remembering what you owe me, if I can't press an individual claim to your leniency."

Too late, had she wished to change matters now. The curtain went up and the first dozen of Florien's admirers congregated from different parts of the house, but, as Mr. Hugo Arnold made no sign of returning, Aubrey still maintained his position at her side.

They were alone in the box as the last act progressed. As it chanced Aubrey had seen the play before, and he derived his keenest delight now through studying the changes of his companion's expressive face.

Quite unconscious of the small storm of resentment which the song of her praises had raised in at least two feminine breasts, Florien made her toilet for the opera. She wore mauve silk made en traine and trimmed with priceless point, with pearls upon her neck and arms, and in her waving, luxuriant hair. She held a knot of fresh violets in her gloved hands, and her fan suspended from her wrist—a dainty marvel of pearl and silk.

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very readily. What a long, tedious day it was—he was in the bank, of course, and could not come before evening. It was unreasonable of her to expect it. What a praiseworthy young man he was, too. Devoting himself so steadily to business, and doing so well, people said. It would be a pity should any blighting of hopes start him in the dissipated ways so prevalent with men of the times.

Evening. A little anxious flutter under a very careful toilet. She would judge his contrition by the time of his arrival. If he was there by eight, she would not be hard with him. The room was full of mellowed light, the piano was open, and his favorite music at hand, a vase of hot-house flowers diffused their fragrance upon the air.

Eight o'clock! The silvery chimes died away in musical echoes. Cornelia shut her teeth in a close grip, and crossing the floor, turned on the gas to dazzling brightness. A quick throb of her heart, and an expectant light flooding her face as the bell rung one moment later.

Another disappointment. The man who answered the door brought her a package and a note from Geraldine, and the latter ran:

"MY DARLING: The book I promised you. I meant to send Aubrey around with it, but he is engaged for the evening at the Redesdale's of course. In great haste, GERRY."

That was the end of her hopes. Little Miss Day did not often act upon impulse. She had a placid temperament, and had been well schooled by that great equalizer—modern society. But now that unlucky book went spinning across the floor to rest in the shadow of a corner sofa, and the little white teeth were sunk viciously into the red under lip. This small ebullition of temper would doubtless have been supplemented in another moment by a burst of mortified tears, with the result of a miserable solitary evening above stairs, but another ring and the entrance of a visitor turned the channel.

It was Mr. Arnold appearing upon the scene.

His evening at the opera had not been calculated to inspire cheerfulness, but he was not so depressed by it as might be imagined. He was not hopelessly in love with Florien. He had expressed his case very aply, by saying that he made his sudden declaration to prevent "some other fellow cutting in ahead," and to know his own prospects of success before becoming more deeply enamored. His mind was at rest on that score now, and all day he had been revolving the question Florien carelessly put to him.

"There is Miss Day—why don't you propose to her?"

"She's a sweet, pretty little thing, and plenty good enough for me," had been his conclusion. "I'll do it—hanged if I don't!"

And he did before the evening was over. Not without a little pang of regret as he thought of Florien, and a half-wish after the words were fairly uttered that he could recall them.

And Cornelia, with a few blushes, accepted him on the spot. Not, however, without a silent wish that he was taller and handsomer, more graceful and refined, more, in fact, like Aubrey.

The affair was very neatly consummated, and the diamond ring which the California prince had purchased with the hope of placing it upon Florien's finger, sparkled a charming fit on Cornelia's dimpled hand. She could not forbear saying, as she surveyed it:

"I really never suspected that you cared anything for me, Hugo. I thought you were just all the rest, captivated by that handsome Miss Redesdale."

"I did come near making a spoon of myself there—by Jove! I did," he answered, with more frank ingenuity than many others might have done.

And that was all Cornelia ever knew how near he had come to it.

CHAPTER XVII. AN EMBARRASSING CHARGE.

THE engagement was made public without delay. The pretty little bride-elect was the envy of the feminine world for a day, or of the part of it that had angled after the wealthy San Franciscan.

But she was a general favorite, and all united in declaring her quite worthy of her good fortune. They were to be married in March, take a wedding-trip through the Southern States, and continue it in May by a voyage around the Cape, and so on to his far Western home.

The trousseau was already under way, and in the excitement of fitting dresses and receiving the congratulations of her friends, Miss Day became very pleasantly reconciled to her destiny as the future Mrs. Arnold.

Florien, in one of her drives, a day or two after the announcement of the existing state of affairs, espied the groom-elect upon the sidewalk, and stopping the carriage, beckoned him to approach.

"Come, Mr. Arnold, take a seat, do. I'm driving quite at random and will set you down anywhere you choose. I've been waiting to offer my congratulations since I heard the news. You're an exceedingly wise man, Mr. Arnold, and a happy one, I am sure."

"Thanks. I thought I couldn't do better than to take your advice, Miss Redesdale. Yes, I am a happy man, and I'd be deuced ungrateful to be any thing else with that little blossom from the 'rosebud garden of girls.' I couldn't get the queen of 'em all, but I've done the next best thing. And I owe it all to you, too."

"Didn't I say I was doing a kindness when I refused you? If I were not something of an anomaly among my kind, I would certainly begin to realize the meaning of the words, 'It might have been.' Not leaving already?"

"I wouldn't but I see Lynne yonder, and I owe him a balance of some hundreds, I think. He's one of the gamiest hands with the cards I ever ran across, Miss Redesdale—took a cool thousand at a clear stretch the other night. They say the colonel's one too much for him, though. There, I don't suppose you care for club-room gossip, but I wanted you to know that I've got my whole crop of wild oats in. 'Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind,' you know, but I'm going to stop in time to spare myself the blast."

"A wise course, and I esteem you more than ever for knowing it. But you are mistaken; I do like to hear club-room gossip once in a while. It's the only means we have of learning the stuff our gentlemen friends are made of. Do you know, I think we are woefully deceived in them some-

times. For instance, I didn't suspect that Mr. Lynne gambled."

"No?" Mr. Arnold's elevated brows betokened surprise. "That's because you've no brother to keep the run of these things, and give you a glimpse of the inside track. Why, Lynne comes very near being a professional at it, only saved by being so fortunate as to spring from a family and wear a name, you see—that kills the worst flavor of what we call an adventurer. Bless your heart, Miss Redesdale, every young man will be a little wild at some time, but it's sharps like Lynne that play the very mischief with us. We can hang away from out-and-outers like Marquess, but to be hand and glove with a fellow of your own set that knows the tricks and has backers—as Lynne has—is too much for common gumption."

"Sow the wind and reap the whirlwind," mused Florien, as she lay back in the carriage and was driven home. "Is that the end Walter is attaining? I will not judge him, though, without an impartial hearing. It is strange that he never mentions business beyond speaking vaguely of transactions on Wall street, and less than two years ago he was so sanguine of fighting his way, gaining a footing for himself he said, before he should urge his claim upon me. Poor Walter! he may have found it harder work than he thought. And that is the influence Colonel Marquess exerts over him—but it must be a mistake. I will not think so ill of him. He has been discouraged, hard pressed perhaps, and found temporary relief at the gaming-table. Few men but find themselves there at some time, and he has not been an exception; but a professional gambler, a decoy as Mr. Arnold hinted; surely it is not possible."

But Florien was disturbed more than she admitted even to herself. Reared in the atmosphere of Miss Deb's severe moralty, she could not regard lightly, as many girls of her age might have done, such a digression from strict honorable principle. She could not think with other than abhorrence of the mean hypocrisy covered by the word adventurer, as Arnold had applied it. To be a professional gambler in her mind was synonymous with an agent for blighting hopes, ruining homes, and blackening lives—then worse than that, responsible for lives, since the victims were often laid in suicides' graves.

"I shall ask Walter and find out the truth the very first opportunity which presents," she said, to herself.

The opportunity was not long coming.

Somebody who made pretensions to that "little learning which makes us wondrous wise," gave a conversation that night. It was a stupid affair, as such affairs generally are, but thanks to the training she had received from Madame Molyneux, Florien got through the evening, and added something to her already-established reputation for cleverness.

There was one *recherche* feature introduced, however, and that was the supper; indeed, it is to be questioned if that was not the single inducement half the people there found for assembling. Florien had come, chaperoned by her stepmother, who considered her duty done when she saw the young lady safely engrossed by an astute man of letters who was charmed to find in her an intelligent listener, pertinent in questioning, and able at repartee. This gentleman had succeeded in warding off the intruders who would have engaged her from time to time, but at the very moment the company were passing down to the supper-room—the time of all others he should have been at hand—the redoubtable knight of many degrees was nowhere to be seen. It was an embarrassing position, for nowhere in sight was a masculine acquaintance who was disengaged. Most opportunely, Walter, who had come late, saw her from a distance and pressed his way to her side.

"Allow me. I wouldn't have faced the stupidity of the affair but I hoped to find you here. I have a better recompense than those poor devils who have been yawning through the entire evening. Let me bring you some Moselle, Florien; your nerves must need stimulating by this time."

"An ice? Here it is; and here is a charming little alcove where you can eat it in peaceful seclusion, thanks to the chance which leaves it unoccupied."

Florien leaned back, her spoon poised daintily above the saucer, her earnest eyes regarding him in a speculative way. Some way her steady, penetrating glances always resulted in disconcerting him, so now she cut this one short with a half-nervous laugh. "Am I not 'got up to order,' Florien? that you look at me so? I've been in such depths of despondency that you must pardon any omissions. Do eat your 'frozen mist rose-tinged,' and let me offer you a *meringue*."

"Thank you, Walter, nothing more after such chilly vapors. I like to be frozen to proper severity when I have a task of duty to perform."

"I almost imagined you meant to rake me over the coals for something. Do relieve my active apprehensions. Put it as strong as you like, for I'm intending to revenge myself by a special pleading after all's over."

"After all's over." Words idly spoken, but Florien took them up. "It may not be very long before all's over."

"Florien, how can you be so cruel-hearted! If I thought there was any chance of that I—I'd put a bullet straight through my brain. Precious little the world might lose through the process, too."

There was something savagely earnest in his tones, and the words cut off short between his teeth. Florien looked at him with almost a sigh.

"You do really love me, Walter?"

"What mockery to ask it. Love! I worship, idolize you! If to possess you and be loved by you during my lifetime doomed me to torture through all eternity, I would gladly welcome the fate. It's just the opposite though—whatever I come to be you will make me. Under your guidance, and strengthened by your sweet affection, I shall not disappoint your fondest hopes, Florien."

"Oh, Walter, it is so easy to promise for the future. But what of the present?"

"The present? It seems to be a season of trial more or less always. A summer day with its clouds and sunshine. You know what is required to make it all sunshine for me."

"I know what you mean, Walter; can you look me in the eyes and declare your willingness that I should know all the acts of your life for the last eighteen months? Have you been honest and upright and pure enough to lay it all bare to the woman you are to marry?"

A very serious light was in the eyes fixed so intently upon him, a very grave shade upon the fair face turned toward him. Who had been maligning him to her?—what had she heard, he wondered? He had a very uncomfortable sensation of chills creeping up his back, and impeded respiration. That very day he had put off one of his most urgent creditors by a hint that he was soon to take to himself a wealthy bride. He was most impatiently waiting his time to urge her to a speedy consummation of the engagement. Had that open disregard of her injunction come to her ears already? Whatever it might be, there was no way for it except to face out the result.

"No, 'pon honor, Florry, I don't think I should like you to know every act of mine. We all do vastly foolish and inconsiderate things at times, and I can't suppose that I've acted wisely and well during even the eighteen months since you made me blessed with the promise of your hand. I don't suppose even you would be willing to drag out to exposure all the events you've taken a part in during that length of time."

"That is not the sense in which I ask you, Walter. I have not been trying to mystify you, and I shall make my meaning perfectly lucid. I have been told that you gamble—is it so?"

"Well, if it is, what then? Better men have done worse things."

"Perhaps, but you were stigmatized as a professional gambler—worse than that, a decoy. That you made it a purpose to lure your friends where they should be made your victims—or victims of others who remunerated you for the service."

"He was listening with hardly forced composure, fearful that more was to come. But to Florry he seemed quietly assured, with a smile playing about his lips."

"What other sins in the catalogue have been accredited to me, or is that all?"

"Is it true, Walter?"

"Her face reflected her doubt as she strove to read his impassive as a mask. She parted her lips as if to reply, and then glanced down without uttering a word. She remembered how direct her information had been, and in a measure how conclusive."

"I see that you do. Oh, Florry, little Florry, who promised to trust me always, whatever should betide, are you to fail me with all the rest?"

"Such a pathetic voice, burdened with such tender reproach! It brought to the quick tears into Florry's eyes, and did more to re-establish her shaken trust in him than any other appeal he could have made."

"Tell me that it is not true, Walter."

"It is not true."

"You have not gambled?"

"Ah, there you have me. I have been discouraged and I have gambled. I was in a hurry to be rich to have something to offer you besides myself, and somehow I seemed always to be unfortunate in business."

"What is your business, Walter? How have you been trying to make yourself more acceptable to me?"

"My dear child, what use of troubling your brain with such matters? I'll hunt up my books of receipts and expenses for the last year and go over them with you if you see fit, and I don't believe I can satisfy you without. I've just simply watched my chances and done what I could on Wall street in stocks and bonds, and the like. Heavens! to see the fortunes that change hands there every day, week in and week out. Why, there have been times, with the proper means at command, that I could have become a millionaire in a morning. It's this thing of dabbling with dollars where I want thousands that keeps me down."

"Gambling on a more extensive scale," said Florry, dryly. "It's nothing but that, is it?"

"It's a game of chance, like every other thing in the world. What would you have me do—labor by the sweat of my brow for my daily crust, and see you as far placed above me as the stars are above the earth? Florry, won't you understand that what I've done has been for the sake of shortening the time I must wait before I can insist on the fulfillment of your promise? You know that I love you for yourself only—that I loved you before you knew of your own fortune. If it wasn't for dooming you to privation, I would wish it never had come to you, since it is to be a bar between us."

"It is not, Walter. You know that it is not. I am not so mercenary as that. You know that when I do marry you, all I have shall be freely at your command as it is at my own. It was not for the money-making part of it that I wanted to see you follow some business and make your own way up. Only active and actual experience will expand a man's best qualities and bring out his nobility of heart and feeling. Your own promptings of independence, too, dictated the same course, but you know that while you should be simply unfortunate, I would not permit a shade of difference to be made in our plans on that account. While you struggle honestly against odds, you really deserve greater credit than in succeeding where there is no obstacle in the way; but when you resort to dishonorable—well, then, questionable means to promote yourself, you forfeit that sterling principle which no worldly wealth can replace."

"You dear little preacher, what a sermon you have given me! You're awfully straight up and down on these points. I don't pretend to defend gambling—that was our original split, wasn't it?—but I've done nothing more than ninety-nine out of every hundred men you meet have done along with me. I don't suppose I could name a half-dozen out of my entire circle of acquaintances who are not found at the tables once in a while—strictly moral men whom you would never suspect of stepping outside their beaten routine of trade, as well as wild young blades who are flush of pocket-money."

"We are wandering from the main point, Walter. I don't want to discuss the vice; I want to know if you are addicted to it."

"And I assure you that I am not."

After their protracted discussion, during which he had regained his assurance, he was prepared to answer with all apparent frankness in the manner he knew would most readily allay her suspicions, and without the slightest regard for truth."

"You—I'm ashamed to ask it, Walter—you never did act the despicable part of a decoy?"

"Never, upon my sacred honor!"

How sacred Walter Lynne held his honor

can be imagined, but the reply satisfied Florry.

"Just one thing more—you will not gamble again? Don't, please. And—and—if you should need money, Walter, come to me, but don't resort to that again."

"My dear, generous little girl! You unsophisticated child, don't you know I could only accept any thing from you in one character?"

"You haven't promised me."

"He hesitated, just enough to give weight to the required bond."

"I do promise, Florry, because you wish it. I will never gamble again. I'm a reformed man from this moment, if it is reforming to forsake a vice which has never fastened upon me. If you'd only consent to be my mentor from this time out—What can I say to persuade you to relent, Florry?"

What he might have said, or what she might have answered, must be classed with unsolved mysteries. There was a sweep and rustle of silken draperies, the curtains shrouding their retreat were parted, and Mrs. Redesdale stood before them.

"Florry, child, the carriage is awaiting us. Can't we put you down at your own door, Mr. Lynne? Oh, no trouble, I assure you."

"He would have overcome her scruples in five minutes more," the lady mused, "and had her name the wedding-day. That would have been awkward. How fortunate I chanced to be within earshot."

(To be continued—commenced in No. 149.)

The Rock Rider: OR, THE SPIRIT OF THE SIERRA. A TALE OF THE THREE PARKS.

BY FREDERICK WHITTAKER.
AUTHOR OF "THE RED RAJAH," "THE KNIGHT OF THE RUBIES," "DOUBLED-DEATH," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER XXX.

CATO.

CLEAR and bright broke the dawn over the romantic South Park the morning after the storm. The mist that filled the valley was thicker than ever, but when the sun cleared it up the scene was beautiful. Every leaf and flower held its gem, and the songs of birds filled the groves.

The Indians had disappeared entirely from the valley, but a trail of dead bodies showed what a merciless slaughter had pursued them during the previous night, even through storm and darkness, to the passes of the Sierra.

The corral of wagons still remained where it had been, but the fires of a numerous body of cavalry soldiers dotted the greenward around the pool that had so long mocked the defenders of the train, and rewarded all their sufferings with its cool waters.

High up on the mountain-side, in the western Sierra, old Black Cato was standing at the mouth of the gorge that led to the Cavern of Death, watching with wonder and alarm the progress of a riderless mule that was coming up the pass toward him.

"Golly sakes alive!" muttered the negro; "wurra dat fur? Dat ole Mountaineer come buck all alone, and whar's marse Cappen Beckford? Hyar he been done gone fur two days, and nebbin a word come to ole Cato, and now hyar come Mountaineer all alone. Sufin' must 'a' happened to marse cappen. Mebbe he want Cato, and send Mountaineer to fetch him. Whar's you come from, ole gal?"

It was strange all this time Cato seemed to have no suspicion that any thing more than a mere slight accident had happened to his master. Danger he seemed not to think of. His confidence in that master's prowess was too complete and unswerving.

And now he waited quiet for the mule to come up, anticipating some message from the hand of his beloved captain. Such messages had come to him before.

The mule walked slowly up, and as she came close, began to bray as if in recognition.

"Ha! ole gal, you knows Cato!" exclaimed the negro. "He gibs you de nice wile oats, don't he? an' you want moah. Well, you shall hab 'um, ole gal, so you shall. Now what news you bring?"

The mule came up and rubbed her head against the negro, who cast a hasty glance at the deep Mexican saddle.

That glance was sufficient for Cato. The next instant he uttered a sort of yell of anguish, and tore his hair in despair.

The whole of the left side of the saddle, from pommel to cantle, was soaked in blood which had freshly dried there, and presented clear evidence of harm to his master.

Cato fell on his knees in a moment, with the pious habits of his race, and prayed aloud with fervor, strangely mixed with despair.

"Oh, Lord, whar for you done dis? Oh, Lord, please don't take away good, sweet marse cappen from po' Cato! Oh, wurra is I gwine to do, ef marse cappen's dead? Whar shall I go? Wurra is I to do? Oh, marse cappen, marse cappen, don't you done go die, 'way from po' Cato! Little Missy Evey she gone, missis she gone, an' is you gwine, too, to leave po' Cato? Oh, it can't be! It shan't be! I se gwine arter him, ef it kills Mountaineer. Oh, Mountaineer, good ole gal! take me to marse cappen, do! Dat's a good ole gal, and I gibs you all de corn you wants fo' you life, ef you does it, shuah!"

He jumped up from his knees with nervous hurry, as he said the last words, and tightened the mule's girths. Mountaineer seemed to know what was required of her, for she turned round and trotted off with Cato as cheerfully as if fresh from a stable, and soon brought him into the valley of the South Park, by the same glade where Belcour had found Eclair, two days before.

Cato was quite unaware of the changes that had taken place in the valley the previous night. The driving storm had drowned the sounds of the rifle-shots, and he knew not but what the Indians were still there. In any event, he had only one object in view, and that was to see his master, and die with him if need be. Cato was one of the old type of slaves, faithful to death; and to him and his master, buried in those solitudes for thirteen years, the war and its resulting emancipation were entirely unknown.

His surprise then was no greater than his joy, at seeing the valley clear of foes, and the United States flag floating over the wagons in the corral.

"Oh, bress de Lord!" cried Cato. "Meb-

be marse cappen not dead, affah all. Dar de deah ole flag once moah, an' de sojers whar Cato nebbin see no moah for ten, twenty yeah. Oh, bress de Lord! I se gwine to see marse Cappen Beckford once moah, like a real cappen on a hoss, not on dem po' trash of mules. An' den I gets Mountaineer, mebbe."

The revulsion in his spirits was as great as had been the depression. For a moment he had forgot the ominous blood-stains on Mountaineer's saddle, and rejoiced at the sight of arms, as none but an old camp-follower can do. He galloped into the camp, with a broad grin on his black face, showing every tooth in his head, with delight, and yelling:

"Bress de Lord, oh my soul! Whar's marse Cappen Beckford? Oh, gemmens, isn't I glad to see ye, jest? Oh, whar's marse Cappen Beckford? Somebody tell me, or I se gwine to bust!"

The soldiers looked up laughing from the fire, and a roar of merriment spread through the camp, as the grotesque-looking negro, in his garb of skins, mounted on the scraggy mule, careered through the camp.

But Mountaineer appeared to know where she was going, for she held on steadily till she halted by a fire where a group of officers were standing.

Cato jumped off as the officers turned round, and peered anxiously into the face of every one there. Then he turned away disappointed, muttering:

"He'm not dar. Whar de debil is he?"

"Here, my man, what do you want?" asked a stern voice, as Colonel Davis beckoned him forward from the group.

Instantly, as with the long forgotten habit of discipline, Cato doffed his cap respectfully, and stood tremblingly between his hands, as he hesitatingly said:

"Please, marse colonel, I se come to—see, marse colonel—ef I kin find ole marse Cappen Beckford mong you gemmen—I begs parding, gemmen—"

The colonel advanced eagerly a pace, and laid both hands on Cato's shoulders, whom he scrutinized attentively.

"Then he let go and muttered: 'My God! It's Cato! Alive and well! Wonders will never cease.'"

"Yes, marse colonel," said Cato, doubtfully, respecting the change with a desire to recognize the other. "Cato is 'live, sah, but I don't quite 'zactly member you, sah. 'Scuse me, sah."

"What, Cato, have you forgotten Lieutenant Davis, you rascal? Don't you remember who caught you stealing his whiskey, and kicked you down the quartermaster's steps?" asked the colonel, with a half-laugh at the recollection.

Cato changed instantly, and set up a counter yell of his own laughter.

"Oh, now I recollect, marse Davis. Golly! how mad you was, marse Davis! An' how we black fellers got square for dat kickin', de vey nex' day! Yah! yah! yah! marse Davis, how you did go on, shuah, when you foun' all you 'hams and chickens gone, an' nobody do'n' nuffin 'bout it, oh, no—'twar de coyotes as steal 'um. Yah! yah! yah!"

The howl of laughter with which Cato greeted the remembrance was so contagious, that it set all the officers laughing in turn. Whether they understood the joke or not, and the stout colonel laughed as loud as any. But Cato suddenly remembered his manners, and pulled up short with remarkable promptness.

"Beg parding, marse Davis," he observed, "but I se forgot. Does you know whar marse Cappen Beckford is, sah? I se come fo' to see him."

The colonel's countenance instantly grew grave. A sudden, painful memory seemed to come over him, and he said, kindly:

"Your master is dangerously wounded, Cato, and he lies in yonder tent, attended by my daughter. Go to him at once, and some other time you shall tell me how you escaped when we thought you frozen to death, and where you and your master have been all these years."

Of this address Cato only seemed to realize the first sentence. He stood stupidly, muttering:

"Dange'ously wounded. Oh, Heavenly Fader! Wurra dat fur?"

But he seemed to understand where to go, for he moved off slowly toward a large wall-tent, pitched close to the wagons, and raising the flap, entered, to find his beloved master extended on a camp-bed, pale and half asleep, with blood-stained bandages on his left thigh, while a pretty young lady sat watching by the bedside, weeping softly to herself.

Cato uttered a low groan of mortal grief and terror at that sight, and poor Beckford opened his eyes.

Those eyes had lost the wild, excited look they formerly wore, and large, dark and serious, they gazed on Cato, as the wounded man said, in a low voice:

"The dream has come true, Cato, but not as I thought. I shall soon see Evey now, but it will be in heaven, for my eyes are opened, and I am dying."

Cato dropped on his knees and burst into a tempest of convulsive sobs as the wounded captain spoke.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RED LIGHTNING'S STORY.

COLONEL DAVIS was standing thoughtfully gazing at the fire. He had regained one of his daughters, but the other was as yet missing. His only clue to her whereabouts was the statement of Belcour, who had told him of the mysterious disappearance of Blanche Davis, when he himself was struck down senseless by the Indians. Belcour and Brinkerhoff had gone off that very morning with Somers and Buford to explore the glen where the wonderful Spirit of the Sierra had been first seen, and little Yakop had accompanied them, in the hope that canine sagacity might discover a clue where human wisdom failed.

The bluff colonel, full of concealed impatience, was yet to all outward appearance impassive and calm, while awaiting the result of their discoveries, and listening attentively for the rifle-shot that was to be the signal that they had arrived at the glen.

In the mean time he issued the necessary orders for patrolling the valley and the neighboring passes, to guard against annoyance from any lurking Indians who might be disposed to avenge their recent discomfiture. There were some twenty prisoners, besides—among them the Comanche chief, Red Lightning, who had been badly wounded in the charge the night before—and the colonel wished to examine them.

He sent for Red Lightning, and the chief was brought up on a stretcher. He had been shot through the lungs, not far from the heart, and had not long to live; yet his

eye was as bright and clear, his face as calm and impassive, as if he was free from pain. His voice, too, though low and husky, was perfectly steady, and he answered the officer's questions like one not afraid to die. The colonel had been long enough on the plains to talk all the Indian dialects.

"Red Lightning," said the colonel, in his gruff but by no means unkindly tones, "I am sorry to meet you here. The great father trusted you is a chief of your tribe, and you have received many presents."

Red Lightning smiled faintly.

"If I have done wrong, kill me," was all he said. "Red Lightning is not afraid to die."

"You are dying now," said Colonel Davis, sternly. "It is the end of all bad Indians. Who tempted you on this war-path?"

"The Comanche is poor, and needs guns," said the chief, laconically.

"And you thought to take them from a train guarded by the soldiers of the great father? See what you have got by it. Where is Cochise? He was with you, and there were Cheyennes among the dead."

An expression of anger flitted across Red Lightning's face.

"The Apaches are howling coyotes," he said. "Cochise is great in talk, but he flees when there is work to be done. Had the Apaches seconded us, I should not be here now at your mercy."

Colonel Davis looked earnestly at the Indian. A sudden thought came into his head as he asked:

"And the Cheyennes, what did they do?"

"The Cheyennes were no use, for their chief was dead. Keche-ah-que-kono fell by the lance of the Black Spirit that rose among the rocks. They feared the Spirits of the Sierra, and shrunk from the contest. I alone had the heart big enough to meet him, and I shot him down."

"Was Keche-ah-que-kono the Cheyenne chief?" asked Colonel Davis, in a tone of interest. "See here, Red Lightning, you know now who the Black Spirit, as you call him, was, and you remember when the captain shot his wife and daughter, for your band visited us the day before. Tell me what became of the child, and I give you your liberty."

Red Lightning looked at the other.

"It is too late, white chief," he said. "Red Lightning is on the way to the hunting grounds of his fathers, and the white medicine-men can not stop him. Keche-ah-que-kono was a dog, and did the deed of a coyote. He bit the hand that had fed him. No Comanche ever did that."

"Tell me, then," said the colonel, anxiously, "do you know what became of the girl?"

"Keche sold her to the Apaches, and she lived with them for two years," said the chief. "Then she escaped, along with the Black Father!"

"The Black Father! who was he?"

"The Black Father who spoke big words from the Great Spirit. He came from the East, all alone, and taught the Apaches many wonderful things. But he told Cochise that he must stop taking scalps, and Cochise wanted to kill him but was afraid, because the warriors loved him. But one night the Black Father was missing, and with him went the little white flower. No man has ever seen them since."

While the colonel was musing in silence over this strange story, and trying to identify this "Black Father" that the chief spoke of (probably some Roman Catholic missionary from the description), the sound of a rifle-shot echoed from the gorge in the sierra above them.

With an instinctive start, the old colonel turned to look up.

There was the tremendous gap illuminated by a flood of early sunlight, which made a glittering rainbow of the waterfall at the end, and shone upon the group of four figures clustered about it.

The four searchers were at the foot of the fall, and simultaneously with the rifle-shot, out on the stunted tree in the midst of the precipice started the light, fairy-like figure of Ahshata.

(To be continued—Commenced in No. 145.)

Significance of Hair.—Hair parting naturally in the middle, and falling over the temple, as it generally does in women and sometimes in men, indicates the feminine element; in a man, symmetry and beauty of soul—genius of a certain kind, which implies the feelings of the woman combined with the thought of the man. It is a very common characteristic among poets and artists, as seen in Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, Dante, Raphael, Titian, Handel, Mozart, Tasso, Chaucer, Keats, Burns, Hoffman, Longfellow and others. In pictures of Christ, and in other exalted, highly refined and beautiful characters, this peculiarity is always introduced by the artist.

Sometimes the hair, on rising from its bulbs, turns in irregular rings on the forehead, giving an open air to the physiognomy. This indicates good nature, as well as exuberant vitality. Crinkled and wavy, and close curling hair indicates vivacity and excitability, if not brilliancy.

Regular curls symbolize ideality, and, when only part of the hair is worn in curls, are instinctively disposed over the organ of that faculty.

Straight hair may be said to indicate in cultivated persons evenness of character and a straightforward honesty of purpose, as well as a clear head and good natural talents.

The dark-haired races are physically the strongest, but less endowed intellectually than the fair-haired. The first are more inclined to manual labor and active exercise, and the last to mental exertion. The dark races are workers, the light races thinkers, poets, artists, etc.

Black hair indicates strength, and predominance of the bilious temperament, as in the Spaniard, the Malay, the Mexican, the Indian, and the negro.

Red hair is a sign of ardor, passion, intensity of feeling, and purity of character, and goes with the sanguine temperament, as in the Scotch, the Irish, the Swede, the Dane, etc., etc.

Auburn hair is found most frequently in connection with the lymphatic temperament, and indicates delicacy and refinement of taste, and if the mind be cultivated fine moral and intellectual power. It is common among the Germans, the Danes, and Anglo-Saxons.

Dark brown hair combines the strength of the black with the exquisite susceptibilities of the light hair, and is, perhaps, all things considered, the most desirable.

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A TERRIBLE REVENGE.

BY JOE JOY, JR.

When a man who is a mortal, no matter how strong, gets reckless, and thoughtlessly does me a wrong, Far better for him had he died when a child, For I wreak on him vengeance most fearful and wild.

Not there on the spot with a crowd standing by, With the chances of losing a nose or an eye, Or to have my ear punched for a very big ring, And go round for a week with my head in a sling; But I lie on my bed when the evening is dim, And picture most horrible torments to him; (In fancy) I kick him the length of the street, Or cut him all up into little mince-meat;

Or I roast him an hour on a very hot fire, And oh! how his moanings and shrieks I admire! Then I beat him until he's in need of repairs, And tumble him down six or eight pairs of stairs; For two or three nights this course I pursue, Till I think the poor fellow has got his full due, Except when the injury done me is stronger, And then I continue a night or two longer.

In this way I get satisfaction complete, And there never was any revenge half so sweet; Besides, it is cheap, and then it is plain That fellow will never insult you again.

Jed Coffin's Revenge.

A TRUE STORY OF 1812.

BY LAUNCE POYNTE.

II.

THE year passed on, and then the next, and no news of the Reprisal came to old Joe Macy. The old man was not so fortunate these two years as he had been in the past. He seemed to be bitten with the privetizing mania, and embarked a good deal of money in vessels. And the worst of it was, it never came back.

The British raised the blockade of Boston, and only left the Shannon to watch the place, and one of Joe Macy's brigs must needs try a pair of heels with the Shannon out to sea, instead of running into shoal water. Then the brig got gobbled.

Soon after, an English seventy-four fooled another of his cruisers by disguising herself as a merchantman, and luring the little vessel to range under her quarter, before she opened her ports.

Now, Joe Macy's fortune was not such a great one for these days, though they called him a rich man in 1814, and the loss of two handsome brigs, known to be gone, with the total disappearance of the most expensive venture of the three, the Reprisal, cut down the poor man's fortune from fifty thousand dollars to just nothing at last.

And then he had a disappointment about Marion and young Gerry. Some of his efforts, the girl wouldn't cotton to. New York's youthful blood; and the young man, who, to do him justice, was very much in love with Marion, turned huffy at last at her repeated snubbings, and left Boston for his native place, where he married the beautiful Miss Bibby, who hadn't a rap to her name.

And when old Joe Macy scolded his daughter for her having let the elegant Gerry depart, she only tossed her head, and replied:

"Let him go, father. You remember what I told you, when you insulted poor Captain Coffin for no harm but amusing a girl. If the Reprisal never comes back, I'll die an old maid."

"Why, good heavens, girl! are you mad? What can you see in that rough sailor to like; you, whom I've brought up like a lady, with advantages I never had—hey?"

"I see a man of my father's class," she answered, with spirit, "who won't think he's honoring me too highly by wedding me, as your fine New York gentleman showed me. And, besides that, I see a man whom you were not ashamed to send to danger to earn money for you, though you were ashamed to see him in your drawing-room, and insulted him for—nothing."

And here she swept out of the room with wonderful dignity, leaving the old captain to indulge in quarter-deck language, all to himself. For the fact was, Marion was a young lady of decided firmness, not to say obstinacy, and it was principally out of opposition that she maintained this tone with her father. Had he not been rude to his best captain, and accused her of being in love with the stalwart sailor, she might never have thought of the latter again. As it was, hearing him abused all the time, she made a deity out of the absent, just to show her independence. But the estrangement did not last long between father and child.

When losses came, and poor Captain Macy found himself a beggar at seventy-eight, Marion seemed to pluck up new spirit under each blow. The house was sold at auction, and the Macys moved into a small dwelling, where the old captain might have starved but for his brave daughter.

Marion it was whose busy hands were at work from dawn till dark, and Marion it was who proved the prop and stay of her father's declining days.

The vessels were gone, and one of them had disappeared entirely.

The war went on, and ended in peace, and still no signs of the lost Reprisal. And still Marion comforted her father and told him that he would yet see his venture back with interest.

"For I know from Captain Coffin's face, papa, that he was never made to fail. You'll see him yet."

The old sailor shook his head mournfully and doubted, but, sure enough, one day, after peace had been proclaimed over six months, in walked long Jed Coffin one morning, as they sat at breakfast in their little cottage, and saluted them with:

"How du, Cap? How du, Miss Marion? I've been a pesky time a-comin', but I couldn't help it. The Reprisal's at the bottom of the sea, sir, but we saved our hides."

And then old Macy saw that his last hope of fortune was gone, and he rose from the table with trembling limbs and shook the other's hand, saying:

"Never mind, Jed. The boys were saved. You can tell her all about it. I'm going out, for I don't—feel—well."

And the old man left the room abruptly to hide his feelings.

Jed Coffin looked after him with a queer twinkle in his eye, and then remarked:

"I s'pose I mout as well sit down to tell it—hey, Miss?"

And Marion instantly answered: "Yes." Then she rose up, and bustled about to wash up and put away the breakfast things, her heart very full of emotions. She had counted with a vague confidence on Coffin's return, but not as a disappointed, shipwrecked man; and she found it hard to give up the visions of returning comfort which had flashed up on his entrance. But she said nothing till all was cleared away.

Then she sat down on a little ottoman, covered with chintz, and made out of an old box, which was all the reminder of her old splendors left, took out her knitting, and demurely said:

"Now, Mr. Coffin, please tell me every thing."

And Jed Coffin complied. He was no longer awkward and bashful now. On the contrary, he took possession of three chairs, on which he tilted himself back in an attitude of luxurious ease, before he began his story.

"It's a mighty hard thing, they tell me, Miss Marion, to come down to livin' in one room, when ye've had twenty. But it's jist as hard to lose a vessel ye love, when she's behaved like a reg'lar snoozer. That ere Reprisal was jist the sweetest little craft ever a feller trod, and she could walk away from der a frigate in King George's navy like a witch. We ran down to the West Indies, and jist played old Cain with their traders, the first summer, taking prize after prize, till a hull fleet came arter us and chased us out. Then we ran down to the Horn, and went into the Pacific, beat up the whalers, and got chased out by two British frigates, the time they took the Essex. But that warn't the last of the little clipper."

We went across toward China and Japan, and tuk to Japanen ther afore we heard that peace war a-goin' to be concluded. And so then we pulled foot for old Borsting once more, and would 'a' got in here all safe if it hadn't been for gettin' caught in a tornado off St. Kitts. That there storm strathed the little barky so that she leaked a stream. We rode the storm out, but we had to leave her in the boats two days arter. And the last we saw of the Reprisal she went down headforemost in five hundred fathoms of water."

There was a short silence, when Marion inquired, in a low tone:

"And did you save much?"

Jed Coffin tilted back his chair, and looked up, with a quizzical grin, at the ceiling.

"Wal, I reckon we saved our prize money rather, and yer father's share's about a hundred thousand dollars. We warn't sich fools as to leave that behind in calm weather."

Marion dropped her knitting and trembled. Then she looked up and saw her father standing in the doorway.

"Papa, did you hear that?"

Captain Macy was staring at Coffin with distended eyes. He had heard the sailor's conclusion.

"Is that true, Jed Coffin?" he asked, hoarsely.

"The money lies in the bank for your order, sir," and the rough sailor stood up respectfully.

"Then God forgive me and bless you, Jed. I treated you ill—"

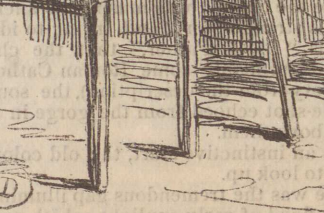
"And I've taken my revenge, Cap. But 'tain't complete yet till I've done one thing more—taken yer darter."

"Take her, and God bless you."

"Are you willin', Marion?"

And she said "Yes."

So Jed Coffin's revenge was complete.



JED COFFIN'S REVENGE.

Under the Willows.

BY JENNIE DAVIS BURTON.

THERE was a wind swaying the branches, filtering tremulous lights and shades over the deadened sward, making plaintive whisperings among the pines, and ash, and sudden hickory trees which stretched in an unbroken forest belt away to the back, but not a ripple or a dimple disturbed the still black surface of the pool. Still and black, and fringed about by a growth of weeping willows, whose long arms reached half-way out across, and let their drooping, slender twigs dabble down to the very water's edge, as if they would have shut it out from all the world, and mourned over the spot in their midst as what it most looked—a place accursed.

Two had come upon it unawares. There had been marshy land about once upon a time, and a causeway, the purpose for which was too far lost in obscurity to be even guessed at, led through an opening in the willows to skirt the pool for perhaps a quarter of its entire circumference. The marsh had disappeared long ago in one of the great changes which Nature is ever silently working; meadow-land lay on either side now, and grass and moss had grown thick over the causeway until it was like a regular elevated roadway, curving in its course. It was that had drawn Roland Proctor and Therese Dale away from the uncompromising straight stretch of avenue, where the elms were like sentinels in their regular distances—that, and perhaps a little to get out of range of the eyes of those other two pacing slowly up and down the terrace fronting the house.

It was just sunset, and a dart of the red fire from the west pierced even to the loneliness of the spot, streaming over Roland's face and then falling like a vivid

blotch upon the dead dry grass rustling under his feet. Therese wondered if it was the sudden shadow succeeding which made the handsome fair face look so ghastly for a moment. It was all her own quick imagination, of course, for he laughed a moment afterward, and caught her little olive hand to draw her close to the brink and hold her there firmly.

"Look down and tell me what you see, Therese. It is the very place to find your future mirrored to your sight."

"True love, would ye, ladye fair? Gaze, and see him mirrored there; Brawny-shouldered, tall of height, Look and see your own true knight!"

She uttered a little shriek—his act had been so sudden—and clung to him, affrighted and shuddering.

"Roland—oh, Roland! take me back."

She had given one glance down into the dark pool at their feet; her face had blanched, her eyes held a look of horror, her breath came in quick, panting gasps.

"Roland, quick! I shall die unless you take me back."

He drew her away with a second laugh and a caressing motion of his hand over her dusky hair.

"So frightened, my pet? Don't you know all the forces in the world shouldn't hurt you while I am by your side? I wanted you to see my face mirrored there—your own true knight!"

"And I never saw it at all. Oh, Roland, I only saw my own, rigid and ghastly—my own dead face!"

He repressed a shiver, so vividly impressed was he by her wide eyes and the terror in her tone, but Therese did not suspect it.

"You are white as a sheet—no wonder your face looked deathly. It looks so still. My own darling, can you forgive me the fright?"

She could have forgiven him very much more while his bold blue eyes fixed themselves upon hers with that look, while his handsome blonde face, a little flushed with eagerness, softened, irresistible, bent above her own. She forgot the ghastly reflection which had startled her so, the chill foreboding which had come with it, to blush and quiver under that gaze and make no

was not one to love me in my Southern home, you know—not mine now." She hurried away; her voice had broken a little at the last, and there were tears in the big dusky eyes, which Roland did not fail to note.

"A sensitive plant," he thought. "All the more charming because so unconscious—ly sweet."

His mother's hand descending lightly upon his arm, detained him as he was turning away.

"What do you mean, Roland, trifling with that child? You might spare her, at least."

"It is unlike my lady mother to intercede in such a case. It looks almost as if you might fear for me."

She looked at him steadily, fancying an under-ring of defiance in the reply.

"Perhaps I do—in one way. You would never be so foolish as to throw away yourself and your future upon that penniless girl; but Miss Allenton will scarcely endure to have you play at love-making under her very eyes."

"Miss Allenton is not under compulsion to keep her eyes upon me, then."

"Roland! remember—"

"I remember every thing. And I am more than half tempted to resign every thing which this insignificant affair of your Miss Allenton's arrangement promises. I shall take the first opportunity to tell her so. There, she is coming now, I think."

They stood beneath the hall lamp, and there was a rustle of silken skirts audible above. Mrs. Proctor turned instantly, opening a door at their back.

"Come in here, Roland. It is quite time you declare your intentions to Miss Allenton; but I have one piece of information this long withheld to give you first. How hopeless do you suppose your case is, ruined as you know yourself?"

He had followed her in, and was leaning against the door-frame carelessly.

"Not so badly ruined but a willing spirit and hard work might make a man of me yet. I have squandered every thing I own, but I am my own master yet, and with a mind to remain so."

"That is the mistaken idea I have per-



JED COFFIN'S REVENGE.

"In tears, my dear. I hope—how I hope it is not on account of that unhappy Roland. It is after his usual style to trifle with every pretty girl he comes across, and I have come purposely to warn you against him. I am a very lenient fiancée, but I don't care to see you hopelessly entangled."

Therese was too miserable to resent her intrusion.

"Then it is true," her quivering lips formed.

"And I am too late. I am sorry for you."

There was not much sincerity in the cold words, but Therese caught at them. She was only an impulsive child, not to be judged as one who had mingled with the world, and knew it.

"He loves me," she said. "I know how you have him in your power, but he loves me. He will hate you if he ever marries you. Give him up, and he will pay you every thing in time, I know."

"Give him up to you? Never, for he might find happiness there. He loves you, you say, and you believe it; but you are not the first his false words have misled. I had a sister once, a fair, bright, loving girl, young as you are, and as trusting. He deluded her with his soft voice and handsome face and tender eyes; he won her to love him with all her soul and then he left her. She drowned herself in the pool down there, and I have worked for years to accomplish what I have done at last. I shall marry him, but only to make his life one continual torture. He is false as he is fair, and you are losing nothing."

"Losing nothing! It seemed so in the sight of the hard, cold woman who left her then. But the passionate child who had lavished her whole wealth of heart-love so freely, knew that she had lost all that made life worth the holding, and with her that meant losing life itself."

The uneasy "spirit in his feet" which had drawn Roland Proctor down to the pool in the sunset glow, took him there again in the gray of the early dawn. There was some latent good under all the active selfishness of the man, and it had been stirring within him during the night.

"Love and happiness and a redeemed life with Therese, or Miss Allenton and her wealth—which?" That was the question he had been debating all the night. "I would choose the first if I dared—and I dare!" He said it to himself as the drooping willow boughs, stirring in the wind, swept his face. He said it with a new, tender light breaking over his features, and burning in the eyes before which more than one woman's gaze had gone down consciously.

Then suddenly a deathly pallid shade succeeded, and he sprang forward with a horrified cry. There, in the very edge of the pool, was a slight, still form, with sodden garments clinging about it, and a white dead face upturned—Therese.

Did he marry Miss Allenton? Yes; and ran through the fortune she brought him and broke her heart at last, for even she, hard and cold and revengeful as she had avowed herself, could not withstand the bold beauty of his blonde face.

He is on the look-out for another wife and another fortune now, but under the brilliant life he has led, he is a haunted man—haunted by the remembrance of sluggish, black water and the dead face of his one love—Therese.

The "spirit in his feet" will carry him there again some day, when the work of remorse and despair, long since begun, will be complete.

Beat Time's Notes.

My many friends lately presented me with a watch about the size of an eight-day clock—that is, a clock about eight days of age. It was accompanied with a speech and an elegant chain—somehow of the log persuasion. I was perfectly bewildered at the extent of their kindness and the watch. They hoped it would always keep good time—or keep Time good; and I think if I would sell it, it would keep me six months, good. It is so large that I am compelled to take it to the well-curb to wind it, and I have serious thoughts of putting it out to board in some steeple and act in the capacity of a town clock. It has two hired hands at a dollar and a half a day to point to the time. It has such a big face that the hours are all two hours and a half long and it takes you ten minutes to tell the time. It keeps the kind of time that is very heavy on my hands—and its own. I can tell when it is day or night by looking at it. I wish their admiration hadn't been quite so large for me.

A BOY'S COMPOSITION.—SPRING.

SPRING is a good thing, and it only happens once in a while, and I am seven years old yet and have red hair. Spring is called the balmy season because, I suppose, it comes from Alabama, and sister Sue had a beau last night. Farmers now plant their spring-guns, and they sometimes get a good deal of produce from the early shoots. I like apple dumplings with milk wrapped around them. I like to go to school first rate, but I don't like to stay there. I haven't got a cent. This is all I know about Spring.

JAMES BOGGS.

The last cold weather in Maine was chilly. The dispatch announcing it froze every operator's hands through which it passed. I took a very bad cold by just reading of it in the morning paper. The people in Maine had to keep their mouths closed, for, if they attempted to speak, they would freeze open, and all the thermometers had to put on extra overcoats, with warm bricks at their feet. Even people who stayed in the house were frozen out. The temperance law suffered a great deal from the cold weather.

Once a careless man went to the cellar and put the candle in what he thought was a keg of black sand. He sat near it, drinking wine until the candle burned low; nearer and nearer it got to the black sand; nearer and nearer, until at last the blaze reached the black sand, and—as it was nothing else but black sand, nothing happened. I can never think of this without a thrill of horror.

JOHN SIMMONS began business ten years ago with ten thousand dollars. By great economy and frugality, and much hard work and persistent effort, he managed to raise five cents the other day to get a glass of beer with.